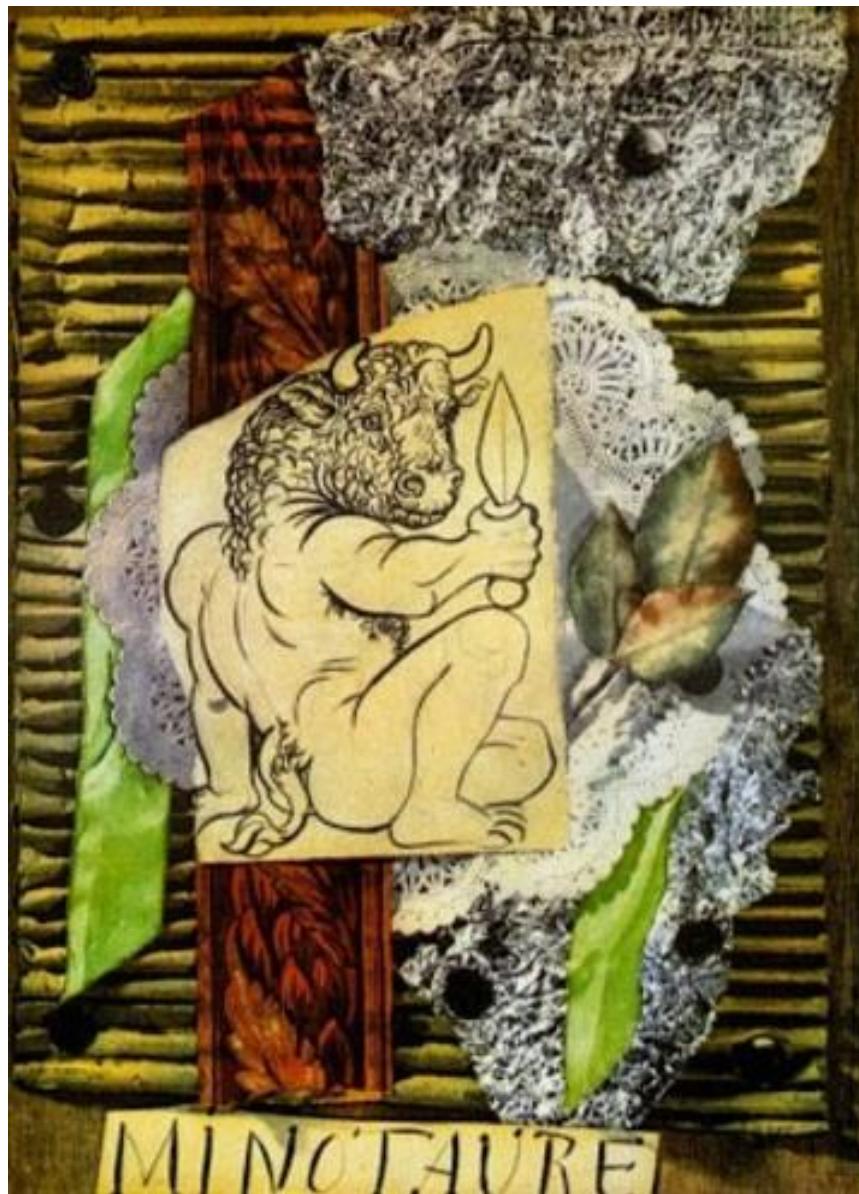


Le Minotaure



Volume Seven

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If you have a submission for the **Le Minotaur** feel free to contact the magazine. The Editor in Chief of *Le Minotaur* can be contacted at

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One day ... a bump ... his hand
went up my dress. I could
tell he was nervous
by the warm, shaking of it.

I knew what he wanted ...
my panties were in my purse.
It surprised him when
he touched my wet flesh.

Aki Kurosawa

Le Minotaur

Le Minotaur Press of Vancouver is pleased to publish the seventh edition of ***Le Minotaur*** Magazine which serves to explore the beast in all of us.

In this edition there are several short stories that also explore the beastliness of artistry and artists.

Please feel free to submit your short stories, prose, poetry and artwork to

penny_plenty321 @ yahoo.com

There is no fee to submit. There is no writer's fee provided by the journal for those who submit. The publishing rights remain with the author.

Le Minotaur welcomes submissions on a quarterly basis.

Artwork

Ten things to do with a Polaroid Camera by Isabella Montsouris

I opened the birthday
gift that my uncle gave
me. What else could I say
with thank you but ... may
I take your picture?

Please do ... he smiled
do you like your new polaroid?
I nodded. It took me a while
to figure it all out. but boy ...
the first picture I took was a blur ...

I did not wait long enough
Waiting is hard for me
It is rather tough to count to ten
Then tear open the thing and
See that I had ruined it.

Try again ... the second was much better
than the first but the flash
had left him with red eyes

or maybe it was the fact
he had been drinking?

The third picture I took was
of my birthday cake, or what
Was left of it. After my brother
had taken another big piece ...
comme un couchon!

The fourth picture was
of my mother and dad
who just stood there
unhappy with their lives ...
you could see it in the eyes.

The fifth picture I left for
later when I was alone.
In the bedroom I stood before
my mirror and took a snapshot
of me taking a picture ... of me.

This made me wonder what

wonderful things I might do
with my new polaroid camera?
It could be my personal
window on the world.

I set it on the nightstand
Next to my bed and got undressed.
And thought ... but it was getting
Late and I had school first thing
tomorrow morning.

Should I take it to school?
No ... someone would steal it
For sure. After all it wasn't
every day a polaroid camera
was lurking about.

My two best friends asked
me what I got for my sixteenth
birthday. And so I told them ...
new shoes, a new dress, a bra and
Panties to match and a camera.

A camera! Take our pictures ...

Take our pictures! And so they
followed me home after school
that day and I took a snap of
each of them in turn.

And they took one of me too
Leaving just two pictures in the
camera. Well one had to be
of the three of us, for sure.
but something was missing!

It was Jean who knew what to do.
She whispered it in Nicole's ear and
She nodded. What? I asked. Jean
said promise me you will you do it?
So I did and well ...

This is the best thing to do
with your two best friends by far
with the last film in a box of polaroid
just don't get caught

or your mom will take away your camera!



Can you guess which one I am?

Call for Minotaur Art

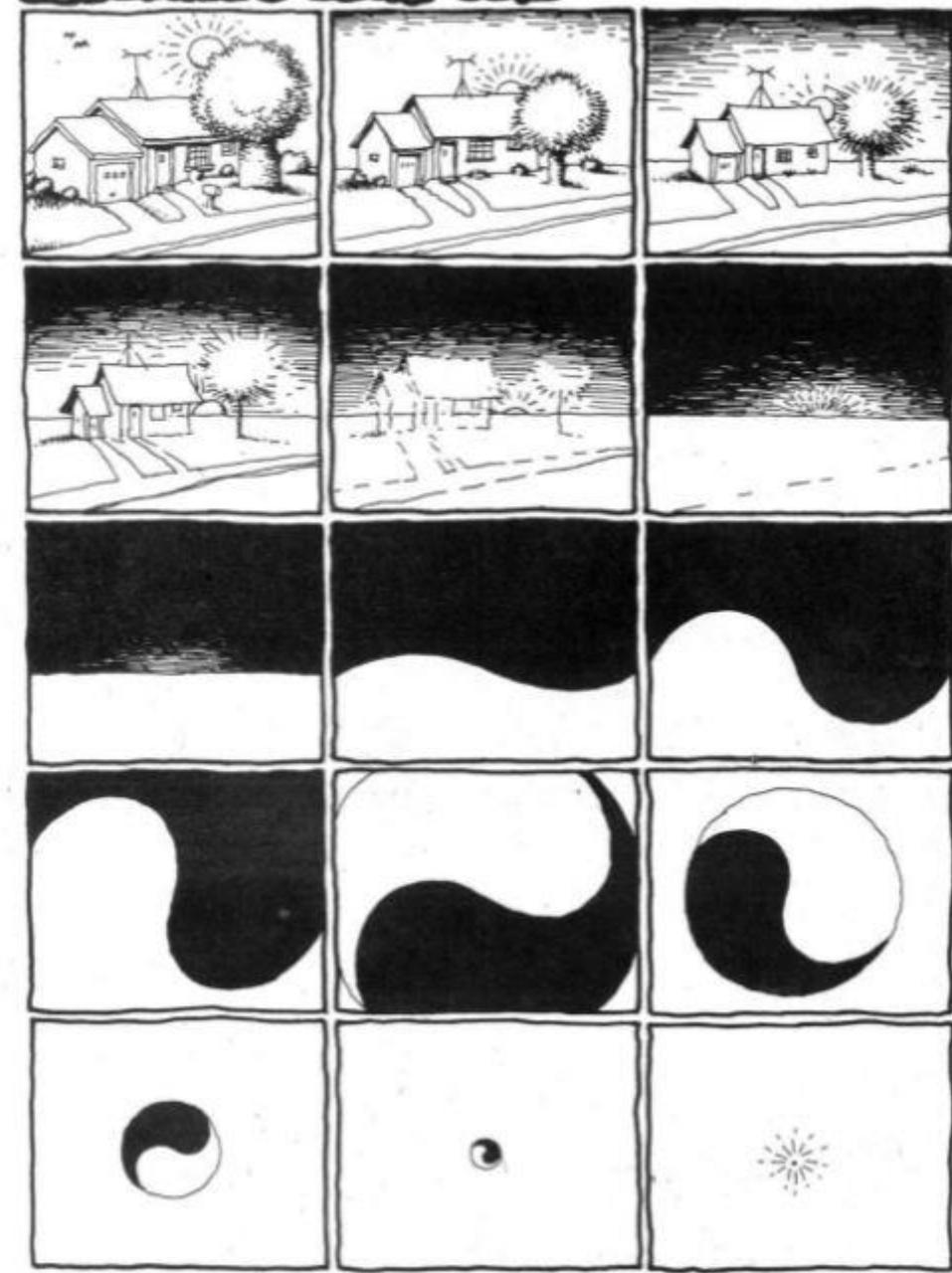
Le Minotaure Magazine invites our readers to send in their original Minotaur Art, to be featured on the cover or within our Magazine.



Send your submissions as either jpeg or as pdf and include an artist's statement of perhaps 200 words.

Six Pieces of Comic Art by Robert Crumb

Kozmic Kapers



Art & Beauty MAGAZINE



SHE: Don't you think that Postmodernism is an inclusive aesthetic that cultivates the variety of incoherence?

HE : Hey, I love my wife but OH YOU KID!

"ALL MEN ARE IN SOME DEGREE IMPRESSED BY THE FACE OF THE WORLD; SOME MEN EVEN TO DELIGHT. THIS LOVE OF BEAUTY IS TASTE. OTHERS HAVE THE SAME LOVE IN SUCH EXCESS THAT, NOT CONTENT WITH ADMIRING, THEY SEEK TO EMBODY IT IN NEW FORMS. THE CREATION OF BEAUTY IS ART."

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

"THE PEOPLE WHO MAKE ART THEIR BUSINESS ARE MOSTLY IMPOSTORS."

— PABLO PICASSO

"NO ARTIST OF ANY PERMANENT ACHIEVEMENT EVER THINKS OF MONEY ONE BIT MORE THAN IS ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY."

— N.C. WYETH



THE THREE GRACES — Copied from REGNAULT

WARMTH OF SOFTLY MOLDED CONTOURS IS ONE OF THE CHARMS
OF THIS EXQUISITE CLASSIC COMPOSITION OF NUDE FIGURES.

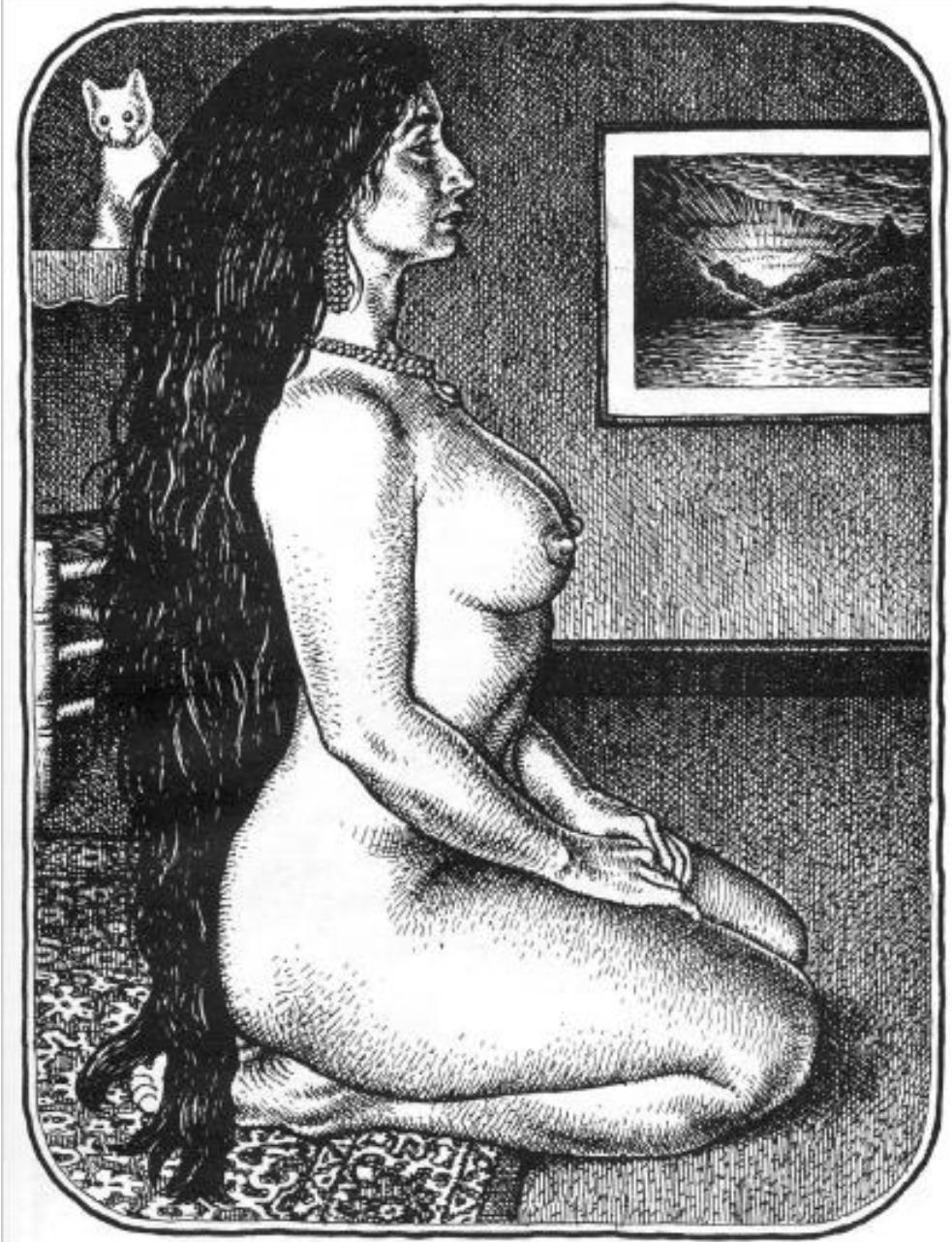


THERE IS CONSIDERABLE DRAMATIC FEELING IN THIS PICTURE—THE LIMBS ARE NOT POSED IN CONVENTIONAL OR EASY ATTITUDES—THE MODEL'S FIGURE POSSESSES SOARITY AND STRENGTH, WHILE HER FACE CERTAINLY DOES NOT LACK APPEAL.

"WHEN ONE FOLLOWS NATURE, ONE OBTAINS EVERYTHING."
— AUGUSTE RODIN



HERE IS A FACE AND FIGURE DISTINCTLY EUROPEAN IN ITS TYPE—SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN ADORED AS A MODEL BY THE EARLY ITALIANS. IT IS INDEED A PRIVILEGE TO BEHOLD SUCH PERFECTION OF THE FEMALE FORM.



THE SAME SUPERB MODEL AS SHOWN ON THE OPPOSITE PAGE IS HERE SHOWN IN ANOTHER POSE, WHICH DISPLAYS HER MAGNIFICENT LONG BLACK HAIR IN ADDITION TO HER UNUSUALLY FINE ANATOMICAL CHARACTERISTICS.

Pictorial: A Mermaid Washed Ashore



Prose

Lawren Harris: The Mystic by Jason McBride

Toronto Life, 2016

Lawren Harris, the Group of Seven's flamboyant front man, was dashing, oracular, ambitious and enigmatic. Imagine a mix of Merlin, Gauguin and Batman, his utility belt stocked with oil paints, hovering perpetually between high society and artistic outer space. The scion of one of Canada's wealthiest families, Harris could have been a Photoplay cover boy—squint and you might see Charlie Chaplin, squint tighter and maybe Clark Gable. His buddies were bank presidents, doctors and industrialists, and he built elegant, expensive houses for his family. Still, he always felt more at home in the deep bush.

Lots of rich people collect art, but very few set out to make it, and even fewer with the obsessiveness that Harris did. From his late teens, he painted incessantly, searching for ever more transcendent subjects. He used his mansion at 63 Queen's Park Crescent as the Group's headquarters, had a special boxcar outfitted so they could venture, in relative comfort, deep into the wilderness of northern Ontario, and earnestly promoted his radical ideas about art in magazines, lecture halls and private clubs. Harris was a breathless devotee of theosophy—a tricked-out mash-up of Eastern philosophy and self-help—and became convinced that artists were superior beings attuned to a higher reality. He wore his studio smock like a vestment and believed his art could shape the country's identity. “There is a holiness

about them,” Harris’s confidante Emily Carr said of his paintings in 1927. “Something you can’t describe but just feel.”



Frederick Varley, A. Y. Jackson, Lawren Harris, Barker Fairley (a painter friend of the Group), Frank Johnston, Arthur Lismer and J. E. H. MacDonald at the Arts and Letters club in Toronto circa 1920
(Photograph Copyright Robinson Photography, Thornhill)

During Harris’s lifetime, the Group was feted and fawned and fought over. They became the subject of dozens of reverential coffee table books, biographies, documentaries, novels, postage stamps, calendars and coffee mugs. By the turn of the 20th century, their work was fetching millions at auction, and Harris had become one of Canada’s most collected artists. Last November, his painting “Mountain and Glacier” sold to an anonymous buyer for \$4.6 million at a Heffel auction—the highest auction price ever for a Canadian painting.

But nothing confers status quite like Hollywood. *The Idea of North: The Paintings of Lawren Harris* is an exhibition of 73 Harris paintings, co-curated by the comedian and art collector Steve Martin alongside the AGO's Andrew Hunter and Cynthia Burlingham of the Hammer Museum in L.A. It opened at the Hammer last October and arrives at the AGO this month. In the show's catalogue, Martin compares Harris to Edward Hopper, calling them both auteurs of isolation. If Hopper portrayed a familiar urban alienation, Harris's subject was a shimmering astral plane. He didn't want to just depict the sublime; he wanted people to enter it through his pictures. Accomplishing that would cost him a lot more than money.

The Group of Seven always looked less like insurgents than insurance salesmen. While they fancied themselves masters of the Canadian wilderness, they were, for the most part, cosmopolitan urbanites, animated by anger toward what they considered retrograde Canadian art. They cast themselves as outsiders but were very much a part of the cultural establishment. If the romantic story of modern art is the story of artists breaking free, century by century, from the royal court, the aristocracy and then, finally, the bourgeoisie, here were a bunch of artists who were happily bourgeois. They held steady jobs, had families, went to church. The Group's art might have seemed subversive, they might have shocked this tiny burg of burghers—at least for a little while—but it was in the service of a strenuously worthy aspiration: nation-building.

Lawren Harris fully embodied this contradiction. He grew up rich and never tried to hide it. By the time Lawren was born in 1885, in Brantford, Ontario,

his paternal grandfather, Alanson Harris, had made a fortune with a newfangled harvesting machine. Lawren's God-fearing Baptist father, Tom, worked as a secretary in the family business; his doting mother, Annie Stewart, was a minister's daughter. The unusual name Lawren was the consequence of parental compromise: Annie wanted to call him Lawrence; Tom preferred Lorne. In 1891, Harris, Son and Company merged with the rival farm machinery company Massey Manufacturing, to form Massey-Harris, then the largest agricultural firm in the British Empire.



Harris, Circa 1910

The only thing more important to the Harrises than money was religion. While the Masseys spent their money on music halls and university buildings, the Harris dynasty poured its cash into the church: Alanson

bankrolled several Baptist churches in southern Ontario, and Tom was a deacon of the Baptist Young People's Union in Ontario. He and Annie ran a strict, if loving, household. Card-playing was forbidden; morning and evening prayer mandatory; church attended three times every Sunday, when the only reading material permitted was the Bible. Headstrong and mischievous, Lawren occasionally chafed under this discipline. Once, at age seven, he put on one of Tom's suits, and his younger brother, Howard, donned his mother's dress and fur stole. The pair showed up at church, parading down the aisle.

Lawren found refuge in another, more potent and more personal religion. While every little kid makes art, little Lawren literally consumed it: when he received his first set of watercolour paints as a toddler, he ate the coloured cubes like candy. A sickly child often confined to bed with a mysterious heart defect, Lawren spent his time sketching his toys or making Christmas cards. He wanted to play hockey and swim in the river, but Annie nudged him toward knitting and stamp collecting instead.

Tom died of kidney failure in 1894, when Lawren was just nine, and Annie packed the family up and took them to the Annex in Toronto, where her parents lived. She indulged the boys—they travelled to Europe, and, at their insistence, she bought one of the first cars in the city. Lawren attended St. Andrew's College, at the time a brand new private school in Rosedale, and U of T after that. When a professor discovered one of Lawren's notebooks filled with portraits of his fellow freshmen, he told Annie her son would be

better off studying art. She put Lawren on a boat to Berlin, where she had relatives who could keep tabs on him.



The interior of the Studio Building, a Rosedale arts hub that Harris bankrolled (Image: Canadian Press Images)

Annie needn't have worried. Though the city was vibrant, louche and crowded, Harris kept his hands to himself, his eyes on the art. Like the rest of Europe, Berlin was a hub for thrilling new artistic movements—expressionism, fauvism, symbolism—and, like he did with his childhood paints, Harris gobbled it up. When he wasn't holed up in private studio

classes, he threw himself, with considerable self-seriousness, into other lofty pursuits: practising the violin, sketching on the banks of the Spree, hiking in the Alps. In 1907, he met the German artist and writer Paul Thiem, who introduced him to theosophy, a cultish religion whose adherents sought a fuller existence. So did Harris.

When Harris returned to Canada in 1908, the country felt paradoxically too small and too big. It was still a colonial backwater, tiptoeing toward economic and cultural independence. And yet it was also a new country, a modern country, its landscapes both unspoiled and unrepresented. Harris's thoughts about his own painting were still unformed, but he despised the conservative Canadian artists who slavishly imitated European styles 50-odd years out of date. He wanted to be the Canadian Van Gogh—and if that was going to happen, he had to render a legitimate Canadian identity, whatever that may be. Or, better yet, create one himself.

Harris's own identity was in flux. He was at once happily domesticated and an enemy of convention. He had come back to Toronto a true-believing, fire-breathing advocate of modern art, but he was also a proud, traditional pillar of society. By day, he painted in a modest studio above a grocery store at Yonge and Cumberland; by night, he was a fixture at Spadina, his friend Albert William Austin's luxurious estate at the crest of Davenport Hill. Along with John Eaton's neighbouring home, Ardwoold, Spadina was a locus of Toronto society. Visitors included the Archbishop of Canterbury, J. P. Morgan and Vincent Massey, Harris's childhood pal who would later become Canada's first native-born governor general. The Austins threw

extravagant parties, lots of them. At their strawberry socials every summer, tables and chairs were set out on the terraces, draped in colourful cloth, and guests drank tea made from the plump strawberries grown in Spadina's gardens.

It was in that clubby and incestuous world that Harris met his future wife, Beatrice "Trixie" Phillips, a doe-eyed socialite whose father had made millions importing fine china. Trixie was as ordinary as Harris was idiosyncratic—her family called him the Artist, not a term of endearment—and she had little interest in the things that obsessed him. They were married in 1910—a convenient, functional union, at best. Whether Harris had a Baptist's self-denial or just a general aversion to sex, he didn't let bodily appetites get in the way of his work. He rarely used the word "sex" and loathed nude portraiture.

Over the next 20-odd years, the couple distracted themselves from their incompatibility by moving several times—from an Eden Smith–designed Arts and Crafts house on Clarendon Avenue to a dark Gothic revival home down the street from the Ontario legislature and finally, at the height of the Depression, to an immense, custom-built, modernist mansion in Forest Hill. They had three children—Lawren Jr., Margaret and Howard—and Harris indulged them the way his mother had indulged him. In a memoir called "Personal Reminiscences," Margaret recalled, "He rarely said 'No,' so we had full scope to try just about anything."

Harris gave himself the same licence. Within weeks of his wedding, he was off on a sketching trip to the Laurentians and then to a Minnesota lumber camp. When he wasn't at his Toronto studio, his favourite haunt was the newly formed Arts and Letters Club, on the second floor of the court house of the County of York, in the space currently occupied by Terroni on Adelaide. It was an elite boys' club where Toronto's cultural czars dwelled. The TSO was born there, as was the Hart House Theatre. Vincent Massey, an early member, considered it a den of "weird geniuses"; Eden Smith, and later Robertson Davies and Marshall McLuhan, were often found hanging around the fireplace.

It was a short walk from there into the Ward, a working-class enclave bounded by College and Queen, Yonge and University. The Ward was home to waves of newcomers—Jewish, Italian, Irish and Chinese—who crowded into its rundown rooming houses and sweatshops. In protestant Toronto, it possessed an electric exoticism and danger. Harris, governed by a mix of curiosity and noblesse oblige, was one of a few artists to venture there. He found poetry in its poverty—literally. The Ward's squalor inspired his first and only book of free verse, as well as a suite of paintings. Of his 1910 piece "Houses, Wellington Street," he wrote that his only aim was to "depict the clear, hard sunlight of a Canadian noon in winter."

A year later, back at the Arts and Letters Club, an artist named Jim MacDonald installed an exhibition of small oil sketches rendering snow, rocks and pine trees. Harris was mesmerized. He and MacDonald bonded over their creative aspirations and their mutual interest in the American

transcendentalists (MacDonald had named his son Thoreau). In January 1913, they took a train to Buffalo to see an exhibition of contemporary Scandinavian art, with its pale colours, symbolism and familiar snowy landscapes. “This is what we want to do in Canada,” MacDonald said.

Harris and MacDonald fetishized the landscape, and a few other painters shared their kink, namely MacDonald’s illustrator pals—Arthur Lismer, Franklin Carmichael, Frank Johnston, Fred Varley and Tom Thomson—plus an adventurous Montreal painter named A. Y. Jackson. Thomson cut the most colourful figure. An itinerant engraver from the Bruce Peninsula, he was moody and poor, a woodsman who knew the bush more intimately than the rest. He slept in his canoe and, when in Toronto, spent nights snowshoeing in the Rosedale ravine. Thomson made intuitive work that veered as close to abstract expressionism as representational painting could, and Harris adored his intensity. One spring afternoon, while the two were painting in Algonquin Park, a vicious thunderstorm suddenly overtook them. They took refuge in an abandoned lumber shack, but Thomson quickly fled, paintbox in hand, to sketch in the gale. When the pine tree Thomson was sketching crashed down, obscuring him from view, Harris thought he’d been killed. Within seconds, Thomson sprang up, waved at his friend and kept on drawing.

United by romanticism, mysticism and their outsized egos, the group proudly proclaimed themselves the emissaries of a new art movement. In 1913, Harris hired the architect Eden Smith to build them their own three-storey brick clubhouse in the Rosedale ravine, dubbed the Studio Building

for Canadian Art, which provided workspace and living quarters for six artists (Thomson lived in a shack out back). The studio cost \$60,000 to build—a fortune in an era when the average Toronto house was valued at \$1,600. Harris paid three-quarters of that, with his pal the ophthalmologist and art collector James MacCallum kicking in the rest. Harris designated its spaces reserved “for artists doing distinctly Canadian work.”

Doing that work, of course, meant spending a lot of time far from Toronto. Harris and his friends wanted to prove they weren’t pampered, dandified dilettantes—when they went into the woods to paint, they considered themselves hard labourers. The group was as much an adventure club as anything else, and when they were out in the bush, they could just as well have been competing for Boy Scout badges as creating art. Lismer and Thomson camped and fished, paddled and painted in Algonquin Park. A. Y. Jackson rode the Canadian Pacific Railway in the Rockies. Johnston went deep into the Canadian Shield, where he captured the northern lights. Harris, meanwhile, often painted around Lake Simcoe, where he had a cottage.

The work they produced was visceral, vivid and controversial. The press dubbed them the Algonquin School (Harris would rename them the Group of Seven in 1920). One critic accused them of having “an absolute lack of the knowledge of drawing, colour and design.” The Toronto Daily Star likened their paintings to “a gargle or glob of porridge,” dismissing them with the wave of a headline—“The Hot Mash School.” Saturday Night magazine satirized their proto-lumbersexual propensities. “[The artist] can’t work in peace unless he has a bear trying to steal his bacon or a moose breathing

down his neck. That's why the coming Canadian artist is such a husky beggar," wrote journalist Peter Donovan in 1916.

When Canada entered the First World War, the group was flung apart. Varley became a war artist, deployed to Europe, while Lismer and Johnston painted scenes from the home front; Jackson was wounded in battle. Though Harris's heart condition disqualifies him for active duty, he enlisted in 1916, contributing to the war effort by teaching musketry at Camp Borden in Barrie.

More than 60,000 Canadian men died in World War I, but tragedy struck even closer to home. In July 1917, Thomson drowned in Canoe Lake in Algonquin Park. Suspicion swirled around his death—was it misadventure, murder or suicide? The case was never solved, and Harris was devastated. He'd lost a good friend and possibly the greatest painter he'd known. Less than a year later, Harris's 31-year-old brother, Howard, a decorated veteran of the Somme and Passchendaele, was killed in France. Just as he had managed to finally create something, just as the country had found the artists who could transform it, all Harris could see was death and loss.

On May 1, 1918, Harris was discharged from the Army, suffering from depression, chronic sleeplessness, confusion and a mysterious ailment he described in his letters as an "apprehensive opening of the eyes." Painting had ceased to be a refuge—he feared he'd never be a great artist. Desperate, he wrote Jim MacDonald: "At times I impress myself as having built everything...on sand." He wanted to go far away from the Toronto slums he

had painted, the Lake Simcoe vistas he dismissed as “meagre,” the Algonquin landscapes that were now tainted by Thomson’s absence. He needed to go somewhere he’d never been before—physically and psychically.

Spiritualism had always intrigued him, and in 1918 it became a lifeline. Theosophy, which dates back to the second century, was revived and reimagined by Helena Blavatsky, the magnetic, mysterious Russo-German occultist sometimes called the Mother of the New Age. Madame Blavatsky, as she was known, co-founded the Theosophical Society in 1875 with the lawyer William Quan Judge. She was a foul-mouthed fabulist, huckster and high priestess, her body draped in Indian robes, perpetually enveloped in tobacco smoke. Through psychic transmissions from long-dead Tibetan mahatmas, she claimed to have discovered the hidden source of the world’s religions, which would guide her followers toward enlightenment.

Theosophy had no rituals per se—practising it basically meant getting together with other theosophists and talking about it—but it did have holy books, including the immense, pseudo-scientific Secret Doctrine and Isis Unveiled, in which Blavatsky details the origins of the universe and the evolution of humanity. In Blavatsky’s teachings, prayer was forbidden, an anthropomorphic god derided; true reality lay behind a dissolvable physical plane. Blavatsky borrowed a lot of her concepts from Eastern religions (the books can read like Hinduism for Dummies ghostwritten by L. Ron Hubbard), but theosophy had serious supporters, including Yeats and Gandhi.

For avant-garde artists like Kandinsky, Duchamp and Mondrian, the Kool-Aid was particularly intoxicating: it endowed them with a supernatural power. Theosophists believed that artists had gone through several reincarnations to become more spiritually evolved. Attuned to a higher reality, they could communicate their enlightenment to the rest of the world, and if their visions were too original, too experimental, too vanguard, it's only because the rest of society wasn't as evolved as they were.

By the time Harris discovered theosophy, Blavatsky was dead, but her legacy was thriving. He loved theosophy's epic sweep and great sense of possibility. "Theosophy is no soporific like an ordinary religion—it excites all sorts of things, unknown and untoward things," he wrote. He joined the Toronto Theosophical Society (serving on, of all things, the decorating committee), and gave lectures on theosophy and art. He quit smoking and drinking and Christianity. And he published in the Canadian Theosophist, arguing that art was part of the training of the soul. Harris read daily from William Quan Judge's translation of the Bhagavad Gita—and believed he was the reincarnation of Judge himself.

Blavatsky was an early eugenicist, who argued that North America would be home to a new, more spiritual race. This fed Harris's belief in the North as a place of soul-saving power: "We are in the fringe of the great North," he wrote, "and its living whiteness, its loneliness and replenishment, its resignations and release, its call and its answer—its cleansing rhythms." Less than a month out of the Army, he travelled to Algoma, north of Sault

Ste. Marie, where he rested, sketched, pulled himself together. He kept moving north, and finally, on a trip with A. Y. Jackson, he found what he was looking for on the banks of Lake Superior.

The forests in the area had been burned 15 years previously, exposing the unadorned contours of hills. The sky seemed infinite. There was no fall foliage to capture, only scorched earth, dead trees and frozen isolation. He and Jackson camped in correspondingly spartan conditions: bathing in the frigid lake, warming themselves by digging a trench through their tent and filling it with embers from their fire, subsisting on a Roman centurion's breakfast cereal recipe—wheat, rye, bran and flaxseed—that Harris said made him impervious to cold. No matter the weather, he was up at first light to paint.

The large mystical landscapes he produced there became his trademark, his water lilies, his Campbell's soup cans. They were both simpler and more whimsical than his earlier work. His palette thinned to gunmetal grey, glacier blue, russet and white; his light became more explicitly radiant; his shapes sculptural, fluid, bulbous. If Blavatsky had written children's books, these could have been the illustrations.

The first official Group of Seven show took place in 1920 at the Art Gallery of Toronto. Harris hung five of his Ward paintings, some pieces from the Algoma trips and, unusually, four portraits. One of them was of a beguiling, open-faced woman named Bess Housser. She was married to Frederick Housser, a good pal of Harris's from their days at St. Andrew's. In 1926,

Housser, a financial advisor, journalist and theosophist, wrote the Group's origin story, *A Canadian Art Movement: The Story of the Group of Seven*. It was breathless hagiography, less art history than advertorial. If the Group set out to define a mythology of Canada, Housser shamelessly trumpeted the mythology of the Group. Of Harris, he wrote: “[He] paints the Lake Superior landscape out of a devotion to the life of the soul and makes it feel like the country of the soul.”

As Housser was composing this paean to his friend's work, Bess was providing more fulsome inspiration for the work itself. She was a self-assured, self-taught artist and theosophist. For several years, she and Harris exchanged letters that stoked an uncommon, private intimacy. “You see into the workings, the ferments, the seethings and simmerings of people,” he wrote to her. He continued to live with Trixie and the kids, vacationing with them, moving into yet grander new homes, but his heart, according to his friend Doris Mills, was “bleeding within him.”

In 1934, the bleeding stopped. Bess found out that Fred was having an affair. She ran into Harris's arms, got a quickie divorce in Reno and moved temporarily into the Studio Building. When Trixie discovered their affair, she threw her husband out. Harris got his own Reno divorce and married Bess. It was an intimacy they both insisted was purely spiritual and intellectual. By all accounts, Bess and Harris never had sex. “There's to be none of that there,” he told his tennis partner Peter Haworth, assuring him that he and Bess would always have separate bedrooms.

Trixie destroyed every document relating to her life with Harris, and her family threatened to charge him with bigamy (the divorces weren't legally binding in Ontario). Others took her side, too, including A. Y. Jackson and Emily Carr, who mocked Lawren and Bess in her journal: "They are down in California getting divorces and consoling each other meantime. [Bess] prattled about higher love and nonsex and made me a little sick."

That November, to avoid possible legal repercussions and the tabloid glare, Harris abandoned everything—his family, his home, his security, the country that he so loved—and fled south, to the White Mountains of New Hampshire. In 1930, in a letter to Carr, he wrote, "The true artist is outside of social recognition.... Society lives by rule, creed, what is and what isn't done. The artist lives from within not without."

Harris never lived in Toronto again. He and Bess moved to New Mexico, where he co-founded the Transcendental Painting Group, and then relocated to Vancouver, where he'd live the rest of his life. He returned, briefly, to his hometown in 1948. By this point, he'd fully assumed the form we're most familiar with: thin and tall, impish grin, snow-white hair styled into a Barton Fink–like nimbus. The occasion was a retrospective of his work at the Art Gallery of Toronto, the first ever given to a living Canadian artist. Harris relished the opportunity, reworking old canvases and ensuring that his more recent abstract paintings received pride of place.

For someone who had spent so much of his life uniting disparate artists, it made sense that he would now receive such lavish attention for his solo

pieces. Harris loved working with, and to a certain extent controlling, other people, but his artistic growth always required a certain solitude. On Saturday evenings in Vancouver, Bess and Lawren liked to invite friends and colleagues over to listen to music. There was considerable ritual to the event. Guests were seated in the living room at eight o'clock sharp. Harris selected a record from his large collection, gave a short speech about it and then turned off the lights. Two hours later, when he brought his friends back out into the light, somewhat disoriented, moved by the music, it was as if they had arrived at another realm of consciousness—just as Harris had always wanted.

Pictorial: My Eyes are Up Here ...



Brassai: The Eye of Paris by Henry Miller

Brassai has that rare gift which so many artists despise—normal vision. He has no need to distort or deform, no need to lie or to preach. He would not alter the living arrangement of the world by one iota; he sees the world precisely as it is and as few men in the world see it because seldom do we encounter a human being endowed with normal vision. Everything to which his eye attaches itself acquires value and significance, a value and significance, I might say, heretofore avoided or ignored. The fragment, the defect, the commonplace—he detects in them what there is of novelty or perfection. He explores with equal patience, equal interest, a crack in the wall or the panorama of a city. Seeing becomes an end in itself. For Brassai is an eye, a living eye.

When you meet the man you see at once that he is equipped with no ordinary eyes. His eyes have that perfect, limpid sphericity, that all-embracing voracity which makes the falcon or the shark a shuddering sentinel of reality. He has the eyeball of the insect which, hypnotized by its myopic scrutiny of the world, raises its two huge orbs from their sockets in order to acquire a still greater flexibility. Eye to eye with this man you have the sensation of a razor operating on your own eyeball, a razor which moves with such delicacy and precision that you are suddenly in a ball room in which the act of undressing follows upon the wish. His gaze pierces the retina like those marvelous probes which penetrate the labyrinth of the ear in order to sound for dead bone, which tap at the base of the skull like the dull tick of a watch in moments of complete silence. I have felt the penetration of his gaze like

the gleam of a searchlight invading the hidden recesses of the eye, pushing open the sliding doors of the brain. Under that keen, steady gaze I have felt the seat of my skull glowing like an asbestos grill, glowing with short, violet waves which no living matter can resist. I have felt the cool, dull tremors in every vertebra, each socket, each nodule, cushion and fiber vibrating at such a speed that the whole backbone together with my rudimentary tail is thrown into incandescent relief. My spine becomes a barometer of light registering the pressure and deflection of all the waves which escape the heavy, fluid substance of matter. I feel the feathery, jubilant weight of his eye rising from its matrix to brush the prisms of light. Not the eye of a shark, nor a horse, nor a fly, not any known flexible eye, but the eye of a coccus newborn, a coccus travelling on the wave of an epidemic, always a millimeter in advance of the crest. The eye that gloats and ravages. The eye that precedes doom. The waiting, lurking eye of the ghoul, the torpid, monstrously indifferent eye of the leper, the still, all-inclusive eye of the Buddha which never closes. *The insatiable eye.*

It is with this eye that I see him walking through the wings of the Folies-Bergère, walking across the ceiling with sticky, clinging feet, crawling on all fours over candelabras, warm breasts, crinolines, training that huge, cold searchlight on the inner organs of a Venus, on the foam of a wave of lace, on the cicatrices that are dyed with ink in the satin throat of a puppet, on the pulleys that will hoist a Babylon in paint and papier-mâché, on the empty seats which rise tier upon tier like layers of sharks' teeth. I see him walking across the proscenium with his beautiful suede gloves, see him peeling them off and tossing them to the inky squib which has swallowed the seats and the

glass chandeliers, the fake marble, the brass posts, the thick velvet cords and the chipped plaster. I see the world of behind the scenes upside down, each fragment a new universe, each human body or puppet or pulley framed in its own inconceivable niche. I see the lovely Venus prone and full athwart her strange axis, her hair dipped in laudanum, her mouth bright with asphodels; she lies in the neap of the tide, taut with starry sap, her toes tinctured with light, her eyes transfixed. He does not wait for the curtain to rise; he waits for it to fall. He waits for that moment when all the conglomerations artificially produced resolve back into their natural component entities, when the nymphs and the dryads strewing themselves like flowers over the floor of the stage gaze vacantly into the mirror of the tank where a moment ago, tessellated with spotlights, they swam like goldfish.

Deprived of the miracle of color, registering everything in degrees of black and white, Brassai nevertheless seems to convey by the purity and quality of his tones all the effects of sunlight, and even more impressively the effects of night light. A man of the city, he limits himself to that spectacular feast which only such a city as Paris can offer. No phase of cosmopolitan life has escaped his eye. His albums of black and white comprise a vast encyclopaedia of the city's architecture, its growth, its history, its origins. Whatever aspect of the city his eye seizes upon the result is a vast metaphor whose brilliant arc, studded with incalculable vistas backward and forward, glistens now like a drop of dew suspended in the morning light. The Cemetery Montmartre, for example, shot from the bridge at night is a phantasmagoric creation of death flowering in electricity, the intense patches of night lie upon the tombs and crosses in a crazy patchwork of steel girders

which fade with the sunlight into bright green lawns and flower beds and graveled walks.

Brassai strikes at the accidental modulations, the illogical syntax, the mythical juxtaposition of things, at that anomalous, sporadic form of growth which a walk through the streets or a glance at a map or a scene in a film conveys to the sleeping portion of the brain. What is most familiar to the eye, what has become stale and commonplace, acquires through the flick of his magic lens the properties of the unique. Just as a thousand diverse types may write automatically and yet only one of them will bear the signature of André Breton, so a thousand men may photograph the Cemetery Montmartre but one of them will stand out triumphantly as Brassai's. No matter how perfect the machine, no matter how little of human guidance is involved, the mark of personality is always there. The photograph seems to carry with it the same degree of personality as any other form or expression of art. Brassai is Brassai and Man Ray is Man Ray. One man may try to interfere as little as possible with the apparatus, or the results obtained from the apparatus; the other may endeavor to subjugate it to his will, to dominate it, control it, use it like an artist. But no matter what the approach or the technique involved the thing that registers is the stamp of individuality.

Perhaps the difference which I observe between the work of Brassai and that of other photographers lies in this—that Brassai seems overwhelmed by the fullness of life. How else are we to explain that a chicken bone, under the optical alchemy of Brassai, acquires the attributes of the marvelous, whereas the most fantastic inventions of other men often leave us with a sense of

unfulfillment? The man who looked at the chicken bone transferred his whole personality to it in looking at it; he transmitted to an insignificant phenomenon the fullness of his knowledge of life, the experience acquired from looking at millions of other objects and participating in the wisdom which their relationships one to another inspired. The desire which Brassai so strongly evinces, a desire not to tamper with the object but regard it as it is, was this not provoked by a profound humility, a respect and reverence for the object itself? The more the man detached from his view of life, from the objects and identities that make life, all intrusion of individual will and ego, the more readily and easily he entered into the multitudinous identities which ordinarily remain alien and closed to us. By depersonalizing himself, as it were, he was enabled to discover his personality everywhere in everything.

Perhaps this is not the method of art. Perhaps art demands the wholly personal, the catalytic power of will. Perhaps. All I know is that when I look at these photographs which seem to have been taken at random by a man loath to assert any values except what were inherent in the phenomena, I am impressed by their authority. I realize in looking at his photos that by looking at things aesthetically, just as much as by looking at things moralistically or pragmatically, we are destroying their value, their significance. Objects do not fade away with time: they are destroyed! From the moment that we cease to regard them awesomely they die. They may carry on an existence for thousands of years, but as dead matter, as fossil, as archaeologic data. What once inspired an artist or a people can, after a certain moment, fail to elicit even the interest of a scientist. Objects die in

proportion as the vision of things dies. The object and the vision are one. Nothing flourishes after the vital flow is broken, neither the thing seen, nor the one who sees.

It happens that the man who introduced me to Brassai is a man who has no understanding of him at all, a sort of human cockroach living out his dream of the 18th century. He knows all the Metro stations by heart, can recite them backwards for you, line by line; he can give you the history of each arrondissement, can tell you precisely where and how one street intersects another, can give you the genesis of every statue and monument in Paris. But he has absolutely no feeling for the streets, no wanderlust, no curiosity, no reverence. He secretes himself in his room and lives out in imagination the hermeneutic life of the 18th century.

I mention this only as an example of the strange fatality by which two men of kindred spirit are sometimes brought together. I mention it by way of showing that even the despised cockroach serves a purpose in life. I see that the cockroach living out its dream of the 18th century can serve as a link to bind the living. It was this same cockroach, I must also confess, who revealed to me the glamor of the 13th arrondissement. In the very heart of it, like a spider luring me to its lair, there lived all the while this man Brassai whom I was destined to meet. I remember vividly how, when I first came to Paris, I wandered one day to his hotel looking for a painter. The man who received me was not the man I had expected to see. He was a petty, niggardly, querulous soul who had once painted a knife and fork and rested there. I had to return to America, come back to France once again, starve,

roam the streets, listen to silly, idiotic theories of life and art, take up with this failure and that, and finally surrender to the cockroach before it was possible to know the man who like myself had taken in Paris without effort of will, the man who, without my knowing it, was silently slaving away at the illustrations for my books. And when one day the door was finally thrust open I beheld to my astonishment a thousand replicas of all the scenes, all the streets, all the walls, all the fragments of that Paris wherein I died and was born again. There on his bed, in myriad pieces and arrangements, lay the cross to which I had been nailed and crucified, the cross on which I was resurrected to live again and forever in the spirit.

How then am I to describe these morsels of black and white, how refer to them as photographs or specimens of art? Here on this man's bed, drained of all blood and suffering, radiant now with only the life of the sun, I saw my own sacred body exposed, the body that I have written into every stone, every tree, every monument, park, fountain, statue, bridge, and dwelling of Paris. I see now that I am leaving behind me a record of Paris which I have written in blood—but also in peace and good will. The whole city—every arrondissement, every carrefour, every impasse, every enchanted street. Through me Paris will live again, a little more, a little brighter.

Tenderly, reverently, as if I were gathering to my breast the most sentient morsels of myself, I pick up these fragments which lie on the bed. Once again I traverse the road that led me to the present, to this high, cool plateau whence I can look about me in serenity. What a procession passes before my eyes! What a throng of men and women! What strange cities—and situations

stranger still! The mendicant sitting on the public bench, thirsting for a glimmer of sun, the butcher standing in a pool of blood with knife upraised, the scows and barges dreaming in the shadows of the bridges, the pimp standing against a wall with cigarette in hand, the street cleaner with her broom of reddish twigs, her thick, gnarled fingers, her high stomach draped in black, a shroud over her womb, rinsing away the vomit of the night before so that when I pass over the cobblestones my feet will gleam with the light of morning stars. I see the old hats, the sombreros and fedoras, the velours and Panamas that I painted with a clutching fury; I see the corners of walls eroded by time and weather which I passed in the night and in passing felt the erosion going on in myself, corners of my own walls crumbling away, blown down, dispersed, reintegrated elsewhere in mysterious shape and essence. I see the old tin urinals where, standing in the dead silence of the night, I dreamed so violently that the past sprang up like a white horse and carried me out of the body.

Looking for an instant into the eyes of this man I see therein the image of myself. Two enormous eyes I see, two glowing discs which look up at the sun from the bottom of a pool; two round, wondrous orbs that have pushed back the heavy, opaque lids in order to swim up to the surface of the light and drink with unslakeable thirst. Heavy tortoise eyes that have drunk from every stratum; soft, viscous eyes that have burrowed into the mud sinks, tracked the worm and shell; hard, sclerotic gems, bead and nugget, over which the heel of man has passed and left no imprint. Eye that lurks in the primal ooze, lord and master of all it surveys; not waiting on history, not

waiting on time. The cosmologic eye, persisting through wrack and doom, impervious, inchoate, seeing only what is.

Now and then, in wandering through the streets, suddenly one comes awake, perceives with a strange exultation that he is moving through an absolutely fresh slice of reality. Everything has the quality of the marvelous—the murky windows, the rain-sodden vegetables, the contours of the houses, the bill-posters, the slumping figures of men and women, the tin soldiers in the stationery shops, the colors of the walls—everything written down in an unfamiliar script. After the moment of ecstasy has passed what is one's amazement but to discover that the street through which he is walking with eyes popping is the street on which he lives. He has simply come upon it unaware, from the wrong end perhaps. Or, moving out of the confines of an unknown region, the sense of wonder and mystery prolonged itself in defiance of reality. It is as if the eye itself had been freshened, as if it had forgotten all that it had been taught. In this condition it happens that one really does see things he had never seen before—not the fantastic, harrowing, hallucinating objects of dream or drug, but the most banal, the most commonplace things, seen as it were for the first time.

Walking one night along a dark, abandoned street of Levallois-Perret suddenly across the way I notice a window lit up. As I approach the reddish glow of the room awakens something in me, some obscure memory which stirs sleepily, only to be drowned again in deeper memories. The hideous pattern of the wallpaper, which I can only vaguely decipher, seems as familiar to me as if I had lived with it all my life. The weird, infernal glow of

the room throws the pattern of the wallpaper into violent relief; it leaps out from the wall like the frantic gesture of a madman. My heart is in my throat. My step quickens. I have the sensation of being about to look into the privacy of a room such as no man has seen before.

As I come abreast of the window I notice the glass bells suspended from the chandelier—three glass bells such as are manufactured by the million and which are the pride of every poverty-stricken home wherever there are progress and invention. Under this modern, universal whatnot are gathered three of the most ordinary people that could possibly be grouped together—a tintype of honest toil snapped on the threshold of Utopia. Everything in the room is familiar to me, nauseatingly familiar: the cupboard, the chain, the table, the tablecloth, the rubber plant, the bird cage, the alarm dock, the calendar on the wall, the Sunday it registers and the saint who rules it. And yet never have I seen such a tintype as this. This is so ordinary, so familiar, so stale, so commonplace, that I have never really noticed it before.

The group is composed of two men and a woman. They are standing around the cheap, polished walnut table—the table that is not yet paid for. One man is in his shirt sleeves and wears a cap; the other man is wearing a pair of striped flannel pajamas and has a black derby tilted on the back of his head. The woman is in a dressing sack and one of her titties is falling out. A large juicy teat with a dark, mulberry nipple swimming in a deep coffee stain full of fine wrinkles. On the table is a large dishpan filled with boiling water. The man with cap and shirt sleeves has just doused something in the pan; the

other man stands with his hands in his pockets and quietly puffs a cigarette, allowing the ash to fall on his pajama coat and from there to the table.

Suddenly the woman grabs the queer-looking object from the man with the cap and, holding it somewhat above her head, she commences plucking at it with lean, tenacious fingers. It is a dead chicken with black and red feathers and a bright red-toothed comb. While she holds the legs of the chicken with one hand the man with the cap holds the neck; at intervals they lower the dead chicken into the pan of boiling water. The feathers come out easily, leaving the slightly yellowish skin full of black splinters. They stand there facing each other without uttering a word. The woman's fingers move nimbly from one area of the chicken to another—until she comes to the little triangular flap over the vent when with one gleeful clutch she rips out all the tail feathers at once and flinging them on the floor drops the chicken on the table.

Strike me pink if I have ever seen anything more grotesque! Taken in combination, under that light, at that hour of the night, the three tintypes, the peculiar deadness of the chicken, the scene remains unique in my memory. Every other chicken, dressed or undressed, is scalded from my memory. Henceforth whenever I say chicken there will always come to mind two kinds—this chicken, whose name I do not know, and all other chickens. Chicken prime, let us say, so as to distinguish it from all other chicken integers that were and will be tomorrow, henceforth and forevermore.

And so it is, when I look at the photographs of Brassai, that I say to myself—chicken prime, table prime, chair prime, Venus prime, etc. That which constitutes the uniqueness of an object, the first, the original, the imperishable vision of things. When Shakespeare painted a horse, said a friend of mine once, it was a horse for all time. I must confess that I am largely unfamiliar with the horses of Shakespeare, but knowing as I do certain of his human characters, and knowing also that they have endured throughout several centuries, I am quite willing to concede that his horses too, whoever and wherever they are, will have a long and abiding life. I know that there are men and women who belong just as distinctly and inexpugnably to Rembrandt's world, or Giotto's, or Renoir's. I know that there are sleeping giants who belong to the Grimm family or to Michelangelo, and dwarfs who belong to Velasquez or Hieronymus Bosch, or to Toulouse-Lautrec. I know that there are physiognomic maps and relics of the human body which is all that we possess of buried epochs, all that is personal and understandable to us, and that these maps and relics bear the distinguished imprimatur of Dante, da Vinci, Petronius and such like. I know too that even when the human body has been disintegrated and made an inhuman part of a fragmented world—such as the one we now inhabit—I mean that when the human body, having lost its distinction and kingship, serves the painter with no more inspiration, no more reverence than a table or chair or discarded newspaper, still it is possible to recognize one sort of hocus-pocus from another, to say this is Braque, that is Picasso, the other Chirico.

We have reached the point where we do not want to know any longer whose work it is, whose seal is affixed, whose stamp is upon it; what we want, and what at last we are about to get, are individual masterpieces which triumph in such a way as to completely subordinate the accidental artists who are responsible for them. Every man today who is really an artist is trying to kill the artist in himself—and he must, if there is to be any art in the future. We are suffering from a plethora of art. We are art ridden. Which is to say that instead of a truly personal, truly creative vision of things, we have merely an aesthetic view. Empty as we are, it is impossible for us to look at an object without annexing it to our collection. We have not a single chair, for example, in the sweep and memory of our retina, that does not bear a label; if, for the space of a week, a man working in absolute secrecy were to turn out chairs unique and unrecognizable, the world would go mad. And yet every chair that is brought into existence is howling for recognition as chair, as chair in its own right, unique and perdurable.

I think of chair because among all the objects which Brassai has photographed his chair with the wire legs stands out with a majesty that is singular and disquieting. It is a chair of the lowest denomination, a chair which has been sat on by beggars and by royalty, by little trot-about whores and by queenly opera divas. It is a chair which the municipality rents daily to any and every one who wishes to pay fifty centimes for sitting down in the open air. A chair with little holes in the seat and wire legs which come to a loop at the bottom. The most unostentatious, the most inexpensive, the most ridiculous chair, if a chair can be ridiculous, which could be devised. Brassai chose precisely this insignificant chair and, snapping it where he found it,

unearthed what there was in it of dignity and veracity. THIS IS A CHAIR. Nothing more. No sentimentalism about the lovely backsides which once graced it, no romanticism about the lunatics who fabricated it, no statistics about the hours of sweat and anguish that went into the creation of it, no sarcasm about the era which produced it, no odious comparisons with chairs of other days, no humbug about the dreams of the idlers who monopolize it, no scorn for the nakedness of it, no gratitude either. Walking along a path of the Jardin des Tuileries one day he saw this chair standing on the edge of a grating. He saw at once chair, grating, tree, clouds, sun, people. He saw that the chair was as much a part of that fine spring day as the tree, the clouds, the sun, the people. He took it as it was, with its honest little holes, its slender wire legs. Perhaps the Prince of Wales once sat on it, perhaps a holy man, perhaps a leper, perhaps a murderer or an idiot. Who sat on it did not interest Brassai in the least. It was a spring day and the foliage was greening; the earth was in a ferment, the roots convulsed with sap. On such a day, if one is alive, one can well believe that out of the dead body of the earth there will spring forth a race of men immortal in their splendor. On such a day there is visible in the stalest object a promise, a hope, a possibility. Nothing is dead, except in the imagination. Animate or inanimate, all bodies under the sun give expression to their vitality. Especially on a fine day in spring!

And so on that day, in that glorious hour, the homely, inexpensive chair belonging to the municipality of Paris became the empty throne which is always beseeching the restless spirit of man to end his fear and longing and proclaim the kingdom of man.

Pictorial: A Man and a Woman by Brassai



That Day I Was a Life Model by Jade Cameron

Should I shave? I flip this question over in my mind a dozen times. I know Zoe does, and he's seen her before. Then again, she says he's in his 70's, and a natural bush was a given back when he would have been around women my age. Also, a bit of hair might provide just the slightest means of protection, even if it's only an illusion. I throw my razor in my bag just in case.

I'm heading to meet my stepsister, who is taking me to my first ever life-modelling gig. There, I will pose for the sake of art. Drawing me will be a single client, Charles, and Zoe, who I've insisted come along. She's modelled for him before, and has arranged this session at my inclination of interest.

Nudity is a strangely loaded concept. The various attitudes and implications related to exposing one's body are beyond contradictory, and the lines between empowerment, exploitation and exhibitionism are muddy at best. But nudity is universal! Everybody has a body, and why shouldn't we feel casual about seeing them and having them seen by others? Women's figures are beautiful and deserve to occupy more than just sexual spaces. I tell myself I feel okay about others seeing my naked body, but I know that I am lying to some degree.

This is where Charles comes in. Charles participates in a weekly life-drawing class, where a group of people gather around a nude model and

draw for two hours. I'm hoping that his interest in the human figure in a desexualized context, and my participation in this exchange, will be a way to confront my own internalized taboos and insecurities. I want to be confident in my nakedness, I want to feel good about my body in a platonic "here I am, no big deal" kind of way.

So I set out between anxiety and confidence, excitement and dread. I meet up with Zoe and we debrief. She reassures me. She tells me that the hardest part is coming up with and holding new poses. I suddenly realize I haven't considered the logistics of this. Shoot. I don't know a single pose. But Zoe says it'll be fine, that they just come naturally and there are no wrong positions. She says to twist, twists are interesting.

I mull over her advice as we hop in the car. In the back is a pile of clothes that she tells me to look over. I pull out a super-soft sweater – high quality and in black. It's like it was made for me.

"Have it!" she says. I stuff it in my bag, and am distracted from my destination just long enough to feel minor relief.

Eventually, we park at the base of Charles's driveway and the moment of "is it too late to turn around?" hits. It is. The dread takes over and fills my feet as we trudge up the driveway. Charles's door is bright red. I am pulsating with anxiety as Zoe knocks on it.

Charles opens the door. He is a small man with gray hair and a black beard. We head up to the kitchen and his wife, Susan. Jumps right into the conversation. She offers us Girl Guide cookies. I can't believe what we are here for. I can't believe I am doing this.

The studio is impressive. There are work tables, easels, shelves of materials, drawers of different paper sheets, toolboxes of charcoals, and jars of sketching pencils. A grey paper backdrop hangs from a roller on one wall and onto the floor, making a stage. It is illuminated by a menacing spotlight. I am thankful for the professionalism it portends. Also intimidated.

Charles says there is a robe for me to wear in the bathroom whenever I decide to get ready. I follow his direction and head to "change." This doesn't seem like the right word when there's nothing to change into – but "strip" is worse.

I begin undressing.

My body and I are on relatively amicable terms. I don't fall too far outside of the desirable norm. But puberty brought large, heavy, wide-set breasts to my otherwise petite frame. This is supposedly a good thing, according to almost everyone I complain to. To me, it has always been a source of deep insecurity.

I struggle to get the cuffs of my jeans over my ankles and realized I've left my socks on last. How unsexy. Is that a good thing? I avoid looking down

at myself as I slip into the robe. It is silk. As I step back into the room, they are still setting up their things and I stand waiting, unsure of when to take the robe off. I am anxious to get it over with.

Charles explains we will start with a few one minute poses, then move onto two minutes, then a couple of fives, and finish with one or two long holds. “Whatever you’re ready,” he prompts.

I slip the silk off and drop it in a pile to one side. Zoe is smiling at me. I feel surprisingly relaxed now that I’m actually just naked. Yet I am certainly aware of the shallowness of my breathing.

I move into the spotlight and decide to start facing backwards. I raise one arm over my head and twist my torso. They both remark that this is a good position.

So it begins. One minute seems longer than it usually does. Then it’s done and I twist a different way.

“You’re a natural!” Charles says. He is engaged in polite conversation with Zoe.

I listen to the scratch-scratch of their pencils. I examine Charles’s studio meticulously. It is almost boring. Now the five minutes. Time ticks away ever so slowly. I realize that I am so focused on staying still that the whole naked thing isn’t really a thing. Finally Charles calls time and tells me I can

take a break and stretch. I again become acutely aware of my nakedness and pull my arms across my chest. I feel my body's awkward posture outside of a deliberate position. The break is the longest part yet. I am relieved when they start again.

We do a long pose and I read every single title on Charles's bookshelf. They are organized by subject. Suddenly the session is over; I slip back into the robe and briskly head for the bathroom.

Jeans have never been more comforting.

When I emerge, Charles and Zoe are comparing drawings as Susan gushes over them. They all applaud me as well, and I don't know how to take the compliments. We say our goodbyes and I run down the driveway.

“So, how do you feel?” Zoe asks excitedly.

“I don't know, Fine, I think.” It's the truth. I'm not sure how I feel. I'm glad I went through it and I'm glad it is done with. I still feel nothing as we part ways. But later, as I travel back home, I am suddenly struck with shame. I can't quite place its source but I find myself pushing the memory of the day out of my mind, avoiding reflection, not ready to process it.

Was I expecting something bigger? I don't feel empowered. I don't feel exposed. I don't feel a new confidence in my body. I just feel weird about requesting an arrangement to stand naked in a stranger's basement.

I carry Zoe's sketches, rolled up with two elastic bands, under my arms as I wait to transfer buses. It's late. It's cold now, and I remember the sweater Zoe has given me. I put it on under my bomber jacket and I am instantly warm. I think of our relationship and how great it is to have a sister who knows me, who sees me, who reminds me I exist beyond skin. Our closeness has nothing to do with physical bodies.

When I get home I unroll the three pages and show my girlfriend the drawings.

“Whoa. She got your tits perfectly,” she says.

Surrealist and Dada Poetry

How Do I Mend A Broken Heart by Jenna

How do I mend a broken heart?
My entire world has fallen apart.



How do I find hope in a brand new day?
when the one I love has gone away?
My mind overflows with memories of you,
of all that we've shared, all that we knew.
I long for your touch and your warm embrace,
the look in your eyes, the smile on your face.
My dreams are filled with your soft gentle kiss.

I wake and cry for all that I miss.

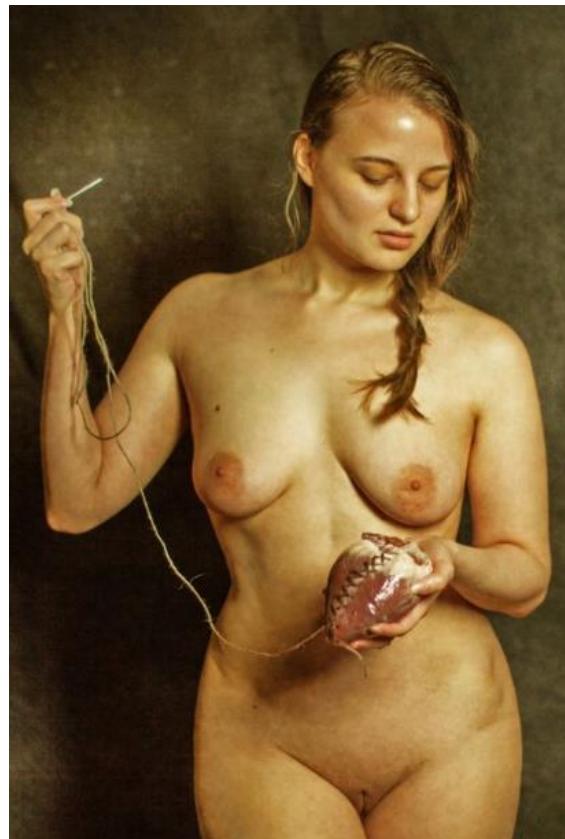
How do I mend a broken heart,

when my one true love and I are apart?

My heart knows to love only you, it won't let go, what do I do?

Our moments together were precious and few,

but I cherished them all more than you knew.



I love you, my angel, and always will.

I loved you then and I love you still

New Poetry by Aki Kurosawa

I have to bow and smile

Gray are the skies over Tokyo,
gray are the faces of the people
walking under the skies of Tokyo.

Gray are the socks I am wearing
gray are my dress and panties
that match the long socks that I am wearing

Gray is the color of my new desk at work
gray is the conversation I have
with my new boss at my desk at work.

Gray is the color of my computer screen
gray is the training film that explains everything
I need to do in my new job.

Gray is the uniform I have to wear
gray is the task I now have to do
but to keep it, I have to bow and smile.

The School Boy on the Bus

There is a school boy
who takes the same bus
I do each day.
He would be just fourteen.

I would always
stand in a corner
far from the push of
people near the doors.

I let the boy press against
me when the bus sways,
his hand touching my bare thigh ...
but I don't mind.

One day ... a bump ... his hand
went up my dress. I could
tell he was nervous
by the warm, shaking of it.

I knew what he wanted ...
my panties were in my purse.
It surprised him when
he touched my wet flesh.

I somehow knew I was
his first when his hand froze,
so I pressed my thighs together
as we swayed in time.

I would not let
him go, until I had
had my pleasures of him ...
he closed his eyes.

My leg brushed against him.
He drew in a breath.
I pressed and the sway
of the bus took hold.

I found his zipper
And then his enpitsu ...
thin, long and unsheathed
and started to write with it.

And there we were
the two of us alone
in our own world,
traveling together ... then ...

It was my stop. I left him standing
there, with a wet hand
... his wet underwear
and a contented smile.

Pictorial: The Golden Ratio



That Feeling by April Chye

that feeling
when I'm on the streets drifting
past strangers past the spoken words past
the ghosts of a dead girl's memory where
an eyelash falls and I unblinking wish
for a greater existence than one painted
in crimson, and rained on in
tears

when headlights loom
and I stare into the brilliance of
its pure light – the scene in my head, where the man turns into satyr
strikes the girl thrice and walks away,
fades out into harsh glares as
flesh meets thought
with death as a
dream

and as a beautiful boy comes in
with an air that hums with life
and cares for nothing more than the
girl of a waxen face and honey-burnt eyes before him and
I consider this immaculate archetype of a species
while in retrospect remember something of a

flutter in my fingers to say goodbye and
feel my middle where emptiness now
resides

so here lies
the frame of a soul with fractures that
might have stitched up at
another train stop, if trains could veer
off the track they were made to travel forth
on and welcome aboard a boy
with his sun-spersed hands and tender smile but
we all make our own graves and mine
has been perfectly placed and perfectly
preserved up till
now

that feeling tells me
this is what happens before
a phoenix meets
flame

The Mix of a Perfect Martini by William Webster

I truly miss ...
The sound of ice cubes tingling within
A steel martini mixer.

I truly miss ...
The sight of a buxom barmaid
Jiggling as she shakes it.

I truly miss ...
The ‘Want an olive with that?’
And the smile when I ask for three.

I truly miss ...
The ‘Did I make it just right this time?’
And the smirk on her face when I say

Make me another one ...
You are getting better at it
Just shake it a bit more ... will’ ya!

Pictorial: Two Beautiful Birds ...



The New World by Mandi Henderson

The first tear of the new world breaks through in resounding stillness
His eyes shimmer as they give their first newfound look out into a birthed
world

Following the shadows of spiraling infinites his gaze graces the woman he
loves;

His world debuts

The universe of forever falls away as his existence enters with a resonant
blast

The man is the child reverting into a state of foreignness

His tongue falters in this love language

The charted map and the known paths reveal their multiplicities

Brown and green mix in an iris of explosions

And

...the second tear of the new world rolls down his cheek

The Shape of Things by Jessie Gaynor

On Smallness

Timothy Donnelly asked me
to name something tiny
and transcribed my answer,
rock-dust in the pocket
of a forgotten oxford shirt.

A place,

a crumbling lighthouse
on the Irish Sea.

A voice,

a gentle but hardened coyote
living in Central Park.

He covered a college-ruled page
with my blurted responses
before presenting his final category:

Something Vast.

A cookie?
A confected catcher's mitt.
That vast.

He would not commit to paper
my earnest foolishness,
even when I ventured

these cookies, from the café just there
(flustered gesture),
they are *right now*
they're the widest and
most unknowable thing
that does not terrify me.

And now ...

the lighthouse moss patch
instead of the Sea.
The bandit coyote's mate,
who seeks her tortured fellow
only in the grasses
above 89th Street,
only howls to herself.

Permutating

You say
I lava you
I livery you
I Lermontov you
I Los Lobos you
I frontal lobe you
And I am almost certain
I know what you mean.
Only the pre-mutated
declaration folds my face
into that of a piranha
or a robot: ignorant
of probability's scent,
crisp and bitter. Immune
to the rush of terror
flushed pleasure brings.

You're some kind of polymorph, woman
through, or through. You're shifting again.
Your eyes jingling like a pillbox full of straight pins,
I can only hear them because I'm looking hard.
You're a worsted tweed for the everyday gentlemen.
You're a hollowed bird-bone, in repose.
Sunglasses on the subway—unaffected Verlon—aggressive nonchalance.

The Shogun to my shotgun,
the pillar to my pillory,
the Odysseus to my oddness.

Woman ...

from the moment we know
we are finished,
we are ready to begin.

Pictorial: I Love Your New Hat



There is more to me than blood and bones by Sarah Gackle

There is more in me than blood and bones;
More than fibers stretching fibers holding muscle moving joint;
More than the spark of mind's fire, snapping synapses.

There is something deeper than senses.
Something I call good,
Something calling back, "not so."
I cannot remove it with a simple bloodletting,
Still it escapes me in spurting streams
Or rises to the surface of my skin and evaporates,
surrounding me, then dispersing.

Yours and mine gather together in a cloud
That storms and swells, collecting his, hers and theirs.
We strain our senses under an opaque sky;
Painted without illumination,
We cannot see that it is beautiful,
This why inside my blood and bones.

Pictorial: You decide ...Girl becoming Boy or Boy becoming Girl?



A Boy becoming a girl?



A girl becoming a boy?

East River Nudes by Mildred Weston

They stand
As if to take a dare,
At water's edge,
Boy bathers,
Bare,
Drawn up
To meet a city stare:



Long legs,
Round heads,
The span between
As spare as wood
And whittled clean,

They make
A river bank design
As lewd
As clothe-spins
On a line.

Pictorial: I Love Your Hat Too ...



Ars Poetica by Archibald MacLeish

A poem should be palatable and mute

As a gobbled fruit

Dumb

As old medallion to the thumb

Silent as the sleeve-worn stone

Of casement ledges where the moss has grown –

A poem should be wordless

As the flight of birds

A poem should be motionless in time

As the moon climbs

Leaving, as the moon releases

Twig-by-twig the night entangled trees

Leaving, as the moon behind the winter leave,

Memory by memory the mind –

A poem should be equal to:

Not true

For all the history of grief
An empty doorway and a Maple Leaf

For love
The greening grasses and two lights above the sea –

A poem should not mean
But be!

Poetry for Intellectuals by Louis Dudek

If you say in a poem “grass is green,”
They all ask, “what do you mean?”

“That nature is ignorant,” you reply,
“And on a deeper level – youth must die!”

If you say in a poem “grass is red,”
They understand what you have said!

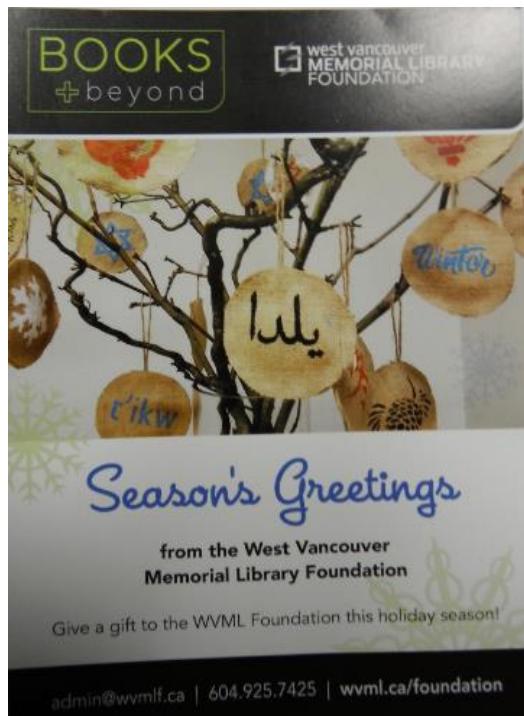
The Loving Dexterity by William Carlos Williams

The flower
Fallen
She saw it

A pink petal
intact

Deftly
Placed it
On
Its stem
again

Pictorial: How to Insult ... in One Easy Lesson ...



Portrait of a Machine by Louis Untermeyer

What nudity is as beautiful as this
Obedient monster purring at its toil;
These naked iron muscles dripping oil
And the sure-fingered rods that never miss.
This long and shining flank of metal is
Magic that greasy labor cannot spoil;
While this vast engine that could rend the soil
Conceals its fury with a gentle hiss.

It does not vent its loathing, does not turn
Upon its makers with destroying hate.
It bears a deeper malice; throbs to earn
It's master's bread and lives to see this great
Lord of the earth, who rules but cannot learn,
Become the slave of what the slaves create.

Dreams are Dogs a Haiku

Dreams are dogs: they sniff
Avidly at any scent;
Shake it off, move on.

You Can Tell a Leopardess by her Spots ...



Un by e. e. cummings

Un
der fog
‘s
touch

slo
ings
fin
gering
s

wli

whichs
turn
in
to whos

est

people
be
come

un

My Dream by Ani Gavani

He throbbing
me wet
thinking
cock!

I
ached
so

giant wholeness.
insides me
in entirety

I
ached
so

Please
Don't
Stop!
put it back

the hard of him
his thrusts
in wanted loins
and ...

I
ached
so

I Would Rather Sleep Alone by Ani Gavani

My Boyfriend has a big one ...
So big that it hurts every time
He forces his way with me.

I tell him to stop,
But he doesn't listen to me.
He just pushes
and pushes
and pushes

So I tell him
as the sun goes down
No you cannot stay tonight
I would rather sleep alone.

Either you
or your ego
... has got to go

You Don't Seem to Care ... by Isabella Montsouris

I want you
to carry me about
in a small box
in your jacket
close to your heart

Not just a picture of me
mind you, but me
in my entirety
so that I can hear the
pitter-patter of your heart

When a beautiful girl
catches your eye
and I can kick and scream
and ask her ...
what about me?

You don't seem to care

about me in my entirety
even though you carry
my picture in your jacket
close to your heart ...

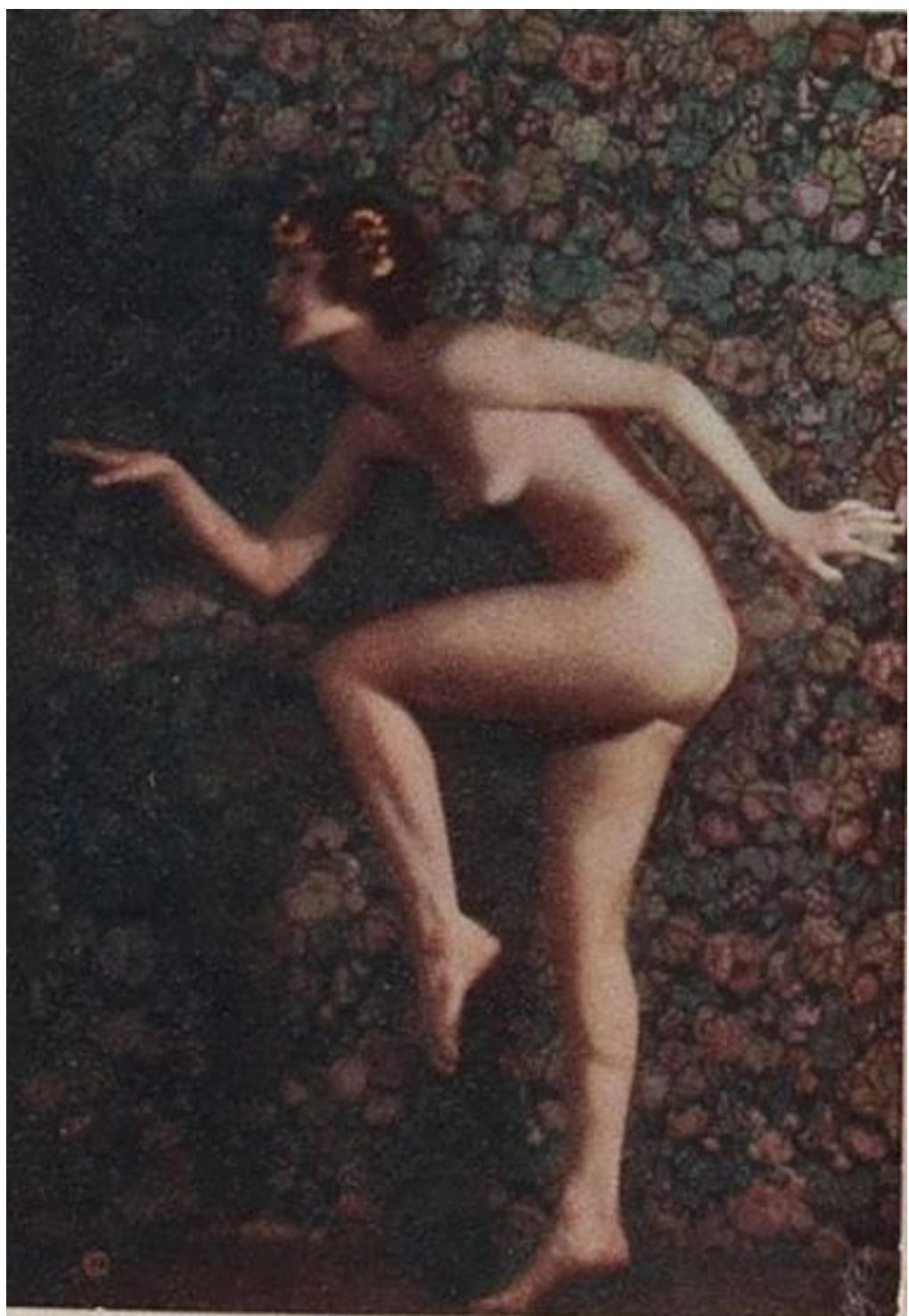
Pictorials

Arabesques by Karl Struss











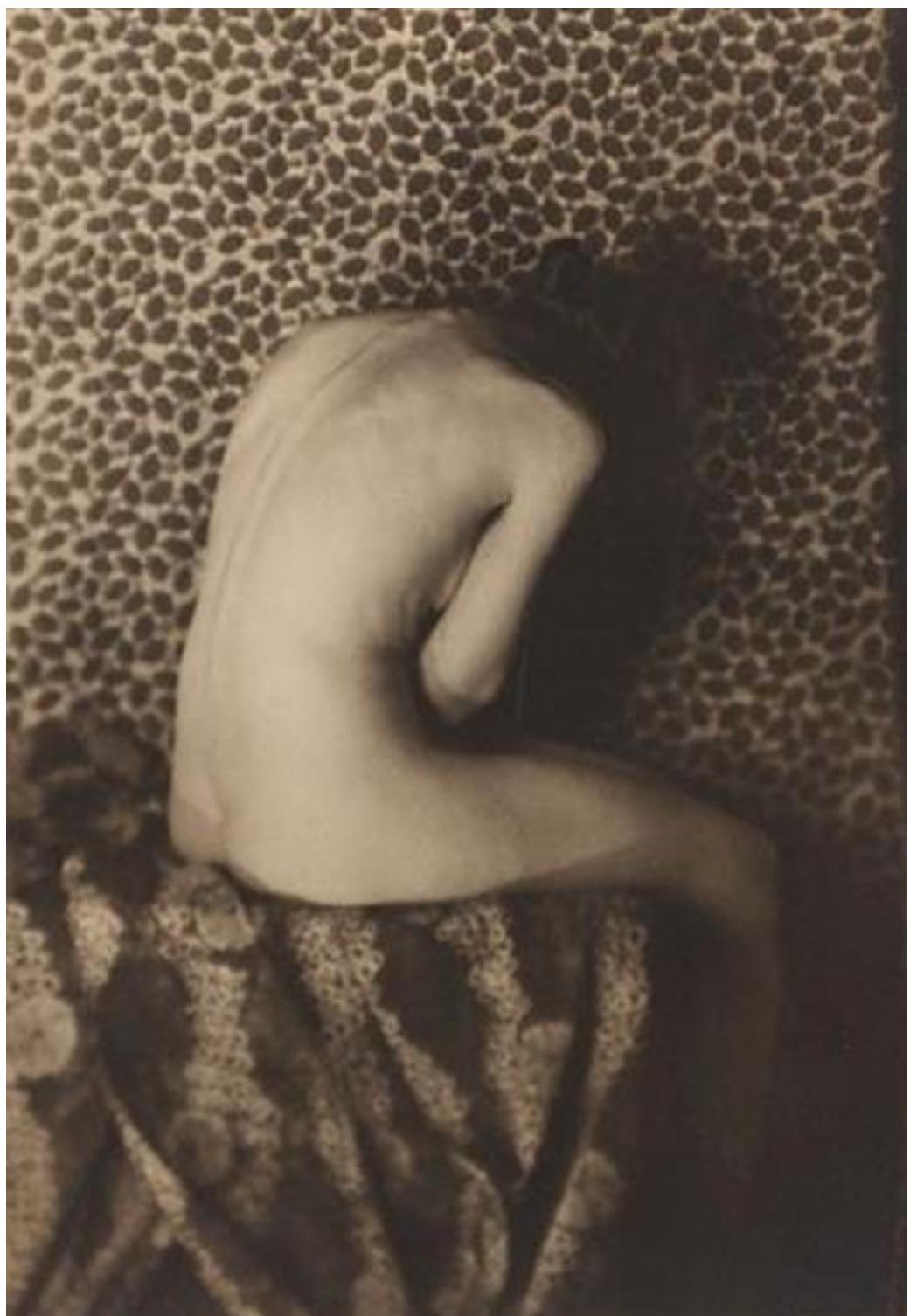


















































Male and Female











Pictorial: What is this ... and what does it do ...?



Novella: A Model Life by Patrick Bruskiewich

Chapter One: Hello Beautiful!

When I was an undergraduate at university I happen to be auditing a mid-afternoon class in probability, on Monday, Wednesday and Friday. I usually sat near the back because this particular class was for math students and I – not being a math student – was clearly an outsider. In this class I was not the only interloper. They let us non-mathematicians in because there were always a few empty seats at the back of the class.

Inevitably the last person to arrive each Wednesday afternoon class was a Rubenesque brunette who seemed more out of place than I was. I also noticed that on Wednesdays she would arrive with a large artist's sketch pad under her arm.

After her third Wednesday late arrival my curiosity got the better of me and so as we gathered our books and notes at the end of that class I drew up the courage to introduce myself. Her name was Lauren (I use a pseudonym here) and she said she was taking a humanities degree and was taking the math ‘just out of interest.’

I pointed at it and asked her about the sketch pad and she smiled looking conspiratorially around the class. “Not here”, her voice dropped almost to a whisper, “let’s go for coffee at the bus stop.” The Bus Stop was the name of the old cafeteria across the street from the old math building.

Our class was on the second floor of the vintage math building. I swear that the floor boards creaked as we walked along the hall way, down the stairs

and out into the street. She was walking with quite a clip and I was having a difficult time keeping up with her in the throng of students rushing to their next class.

When I got to the bottom of the stairs and exited the old oak doors she was waiting impatiently for me. We crossed the street without saying a word and she made a bee-line to a window booth near the back of the crowded café. That booth had some dirty dishes but that didn't deter her. She sat herself down and pushed the dirty dishes to the front edge of the booth.

I followed her into the booth and sat with my back now to the door. Lauren raised her hand and waved for a waitress. As she did this I had the odd feeling an ol' gun fighter – would never have his back to the door. But I figured I had no choice but to let this feeling drop just this once.

She was looking past me back at the door of the Bus Stop cafe. I looked over my shoulder and saw a fellow standing in the doorway trying to decide whether he was going to come in. As I looked back he decided to turn and make a speedy exit.

I turned back to her. “You recognize someone?”

She shook her head and looked down. My sixth sense told me otherwise.

“... expecting someone?”

“No ...”

“You seem to be watching the door?”

“It’s just someone I know.”

“Ah ... I recognize him as one of the students in the math class we had just had.” Her old boyfriend, I thought.

She nodded. “He’s just one of the math students who is helping me with probability and statistics homework.” She said this nonchalantly and looked up over my shoulder as if to double check. “He’s gone,” she said.

I smiled knowingly. I had an instantaneous vision of her and her love sick mathematician friend working together late at night in the library or some coffee shop – maybe even here at the Bus Stop in this same booth – she on her math and he on her.

My sixth sense told me there was more to the story and that it was best not to ask and just let the matter drop, at least for now.

It was almost as if she was reading my mind. “You’re not a math student are you?”

I shook my head.

Her face became rather sombre. “Good ...Mathematicians are screwballs.”

“But I do like math ...” I paused for emphasis. “I am just auditing the course because I need to learn the math.”

“Oh.” For a blink of an eye a flicker of what could have passed as fear ran across her eyes.

“But I am not a screw ball ...” I gave her a warm and encouraging smile.

Perhaps this was a moment of decision for her for Lauren studied the earnest expression on my face for a second then laughed. She decided to stay and settled in. Then she leaned forward and asked. “You won’t screw around with me will you?”

“I am not quite sure I am following what you are saying ...”

“It’s my mind you are interested in right?”

I looked at her and didn’t know how to answer that retort and so I merely said “I am Catholic.”

While she said this I noticed she reached for a gold cross on a necklace around her neck. “... so am I ...” She fingered it nervously.

I was a little less uncertain, but not too pleased with the complications – all I wanted was a cup of coffee and a good conversation – and so I leaned forward and shifted.

She stopped her nervousness. I think Lauren thought I was about to stand and abandon her in the booth, for she quickly asked me “Do you like art?”

“Yes.” I hadn’t expected the question about art. I was expecting a question or two about the math homework we had. My voice was a bit uncertain, so I nodded to provide some legitimacy to my answer.

She smirked. “Do you have a favourite artist?”

I wondered if this was to become a game of twenty questions? There was only one way to find out, with a terse answer. “I do.”

She waited a few seconds expecting more. The awkwardness was broken by the waitress, dressed in a well-worn yellow dress and white apron, suitably stained with coffee asking “do ya wanna menu?”

Lauren shook her head and firmly ordered “Coffee with cream … and an apple pie, heated and a la mode.”

The waitress smiled knowingly. “The usual …” and wrote down Lauren’s order.

Then the waitress turned to me.

“Coffee for me … just black.”

She placed a hand on her hip. “Want anything else with that deary?”

Her assertive gaze had no effect on me, nor her attempt to up-sell my simple cup of coffee. I shook my head. “I will just stick to black coffee, thank you.”

The waitress seemed to mind my austere “cup-of-coffee”. She picked up the dirty dishes, but she didn’t wipe the table and high tailed it back to the counter with the dirty dishes and our order. I guess we were hardly worth her effort.

With a blasé motion I flicked a few crumbs off the table on to the floor.

Lauren turned back to me. “You didn’t answer the question.”

“Yes I did … you asked me if I had a favourite artist.” I thought I might push back a bit and see what happened. “I answered your question.”

“Are all math types eggheads?”

I shrugged my shoulders, raised my hands and smiled. “Define egg head ...”

“Too much brain … and too much sex on the brain.”

This told me all I needed to know about Lauren and her lovesick mathematician friend. I shrugged. “You know what they say about there being only enough blood in a man for thought … or for other things …”

“Ok …” Lauren seemed amused by my riposte. “Let me ask you … who is your favourite artist?

“Well … I have several artists who I admire … Michel Angelo” (I made sure to separate the two names as someone knowledgeable of art would do)
“Matisse, Rodin, Renoir … but perhaps my most favourite artist is…”

On queue the waitress arrived back with our coffees and interrupted my words.

She set down the china cups with saucers and poured our coffees. “Freshly brewed” the waitress said.”

She then turned to Lauren “here’s your cream deary” and set the stainless steel cream pour beside her coffee “your pie will be another minute …”.

I knew that Lauren was annoyed by the waitress’ interruption.

I think the waitress supposed this too, having perhaps borne witness to Lauren's past rendezvous here at back booth in the Bus Stop. She looked at me with a expression of warning, then the old waitress left in a dramatic swirl of her yellow dress and stained apron.

I admit I was amused by Lauren's annoyance, and had to work hard to hide my merriment. I also think I understood the old waitress' warning.

As she poured her cream Lauren pressed on "... your most favourite artists is ..." I noticed she didn't have a spoon.

I decided to have some more fun with her and with an inquisitive tone I asked "spoon?" as I handed her mine. She looked down and noticed her spoon was missing and took the one I offered her.

Then I took the bowl of sugar cubes from the window side of the booth and handed it to her. She took one, then another, then a third sugar and mixed them in. As I watched her I measured her and her coffee. It was 1/3 coffee. 1/3 cream and 1/3 sugar ...

How someone takes their coffee says something about a person. She was mixed up. In a huff with me she repeated her question "Who is your most favourite artist?"

I lifted my cup and took a slow and delicious sip of my black coffee. I wanted things straight and uncomplicated. Slowly I set the cup down and

rubbed my tongue across my lips, then I smugly answered her direct question, “Leonardo da Vinci … he has been my favourite since I was six years old.”

“Really … six years old!” She was definitely annoyed and did not sound convinced.

“Well …,” I took another slow sip of coffee for emphasis. Can’t say I wasn’t having fun with her. “That was the year my mother let me look at her Time-Life book about him.”

The look on Lauren’s face was a mix between bewilderment and disbelief. Perhaps she thought I was some kind of closet prodigy – but I was merely persistent and stubborn – ask my mom.

I waited a second before continuing. “At six I could appreciate most of his drawings and paintings but couldn’t read the words. The words came later. Besides at that age my mom didn’t want me to get into the habit of sneaking a peek at anything other than the male form”

She smiled. That seemed to set her mind at rest. “Can you draw?”, she asked.

“A little but not very well.”

The waitress arrived with her apple pie a la mode. And I let her dig in for a few minutes while I studied her. She was well dressed in a grey blouse with a grey skirt, with a jacket that had a flare to it. She wore a practical pair of Italian shoes, with a small buckle on it. She wore a scarf that was a light blue that contrasted with the darker blue of her jacket. All in all, her style was European, either German or Austrian. Definitely not French or Italian. I put my money on Austrian, because of the Italian shoes.

Lauren had a round face, with big brown eyes and shoulder length hair that was looked after. She wore simple ear rings. Her bosom was quite a hand full, which was understandable given her sweet tooth. Rubens would be pleased with her, Renoir less so.

I think Lauren noticed that I was sizing her up and so she set aside her half-finished apple pie. I guess she figured she could get back to it now that the vanilla ice cream was gone.

“You have European heritage don’t you?”

“How do you figure that?”

“Your fashion sense.”

“She glanced down at what she was wearing. “Is that what you were looking at.”

I must have blushed because she continued on.

“Or was it what is underneath?”

I smiled and blushed a bit more.

“Just as I thought … do you like what you see?”

I pointed to her sketch book. “You haven’t shown me anything yet.”

She opened her sketch book. She showed me a figurative sketch, then another and another, all rapid drawings made in pencil. They were mostly female figuratives. There were a few male figuratives near the back of the sketchbook and I wondered whether they might be sketches of her love sick mathematician.

The final drawing was a portrait of him and that betrayed the matter.

“They are lovely,” I said. “You are a very good artist.”

“Thank you …” She explained that she was always late for the Wednesday afternoon classes because she had a figurative drawing session during the two hours before. It was a drop extracurricular art class organized by the some art students, on campus. To attend cost \$ 2 a session. The proceeds went to pay the models.

She looked up at me. “Have you ever drawn from a model before?”

I shook my head.

Lauren leaned back in the booth and pressed her hands against the table edge in glee, “you must come then ... next Wednesday.”

I started to feel my face grow warm and my loins stir.

I looked down. “I think I would find it hard to concentrate if not draw ...”

Lauren obviously felt emboldened by my admission. “If you have never done this before then you must come.” I could tell she felt the need to instruct this novice in the praxis of the artistic world, in the manner that a grown woman might instruct a young man in the art of love.

I thought maybe an excuse or two would get me out of the invite. “I don’t have a sketch pad and any good pencils.” That was a feeble excuse even to my ears.

“I have an extra sketch pad I can lend you and ... well ... don’t tell me you don’t have any pencils.”

Just then my godsend the waitress arrived to top up our coffees. She glanced down at the sketch books and noticed the drawings. “You an artist deary?”

She asked Lauren with her drawl. I looked out the window as the waitress asked her.

Blood was rushing to that province between my navel and my knees. My catholic parents had kept me on the straight and narrow. But here was an invitation that would not send me to hell – after all Michel Angelo had decorated the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel with figuratives.

It had started to rain outside and I watched some of the drops as they rolled down the window pane.

I turned back. The waitress had now left.

Lauren had closed her sketchbook. I could tell that she was now studying me.

“You have never seen a nude before in real life have you?

I turned to look at her and nodded. But again, I was not convincing.

“No you haven’t.”

I pointed out the window to the boulevard. “Just over there ... the Lady Godiva Ride ...”

“What … last month!” As she laughed her hair and bosom bobbed in unison. “The engineers and their folly. That doesn’t count.” The engineers at our university use to have an annual Lady Godiva ride (now long discontinued).

“And why not?”

“She might have had no bra on … but her bottom was covered,” Lauren grabbed her bosom, “and her long hair was concealing her boobs.” I was surprised in Lauren’s use of the slang. But she had a point.

Lady Godiva had ridden past just as the two of us were leaving the math class – in fact right past the Bus Stop café – and so if I had seen her, so had Lauren.

On that afternoon several weeks back I had been close enough to the beautiful woman on the horse that I could tell her toe nails were painted the same red as her panties, and that she was a strawberry blonde. But I could also tell she was wearing a strawberry blonde wig that did cover her bosom.

I looked out the window again. Lauren could tell I needed a moment or two to collect my thoughts and so she finished her apple pie and left me in peace.

I felt her hand on mine. It was warm and soft. “Come on it will be fun.” She smiled. “We can meet here for lunch next Wednesday at 10:30 then go to the 11:00 drawing class. Lunch and the session will be my treat.”

She squeezed my hand with such earnestness that I nodded. If I got cold feet I just might not show up.

Gallantly I said “in that case let me pick up our pie and coffees.” I dug a few dollars out of my wallet and plunked them down on the table. The waitress reappeared to settle the receipt and I left a pile of coins as a tip.

When we got to the door Lauren looked outside and then noticed it was raining. I handed her my folding umbrella. “Well … you might need this.”

“You don’t need it?”

I shook my head and opened the door. Together we walked out of the Bus Stop café. I don’t know why we did but at the very same moment we both looked across the road and through the window and into the math library. There was the lovesick math student watching the comings and goings into the Bus Stop café.

Even from where we were, across the street, we could see he had a stern and severe look on his face. She turned to ignore him, as I did as well.

“See you in class on Friday,” she said, and “thanks for lending me your umbrella.” She dashed out in the rain calling back over her shoulder. “I’m late for my next class.”

I looked at my watch. She would be twenty five minutes late and I had missed my afternoon bus.

The sky had now opened up and it was raining cats and dogs and I would have to wait a good half hour at the bus stop in the rain for the next one. Instead, I made my way to the main library in search of art books on “how to draw the figure … I had a week after all.

Next Wednesday, after several days of careful reading, two sketch books, a half dozen Staedtler HB pencils, and six frantic late night drawing session I figured I was just about ready to try the real thing.

Lauren arrived several minutes late next Wednesday at the Bus Stop café. Sitting in the same booth in the far back this time I had my eyes on the door and my back to the wall – as any old gun fighter wanted. Once again her lovesick friend followed her in but got cold feet, turned tail and left.

I admit I almost wished she hadn’t shown up because I was getting cold feet. She was happy to see me and our lunch was pleasant enough.

We ate our light lunch and conversed about this that and the other things, and even talked a bit about math, and with sandwiches and her “usual” now disposed of, she led the way on this adventure. I tried to keep up but she was a woman on her quest. She had to stop twice times so that I could catch my breath. It was a five minute walk, and a tiring one at the clip she was on, before we arrived.

Just before we walked into the building I swore I saw a familiar face duck between one of the trees in the boulevard. I don't think she saw him.

The drawing session was in a run-down single story green building that doubled as a practice theatre for the drama students. I had walked by this non-descript building many times before without giving it a second thought.

Just before we entered, Lauren took me by the arm and steered me through the door. There was no escaping this now, I thought. We entered though one of the two tall, ponderous, over height doors that went to the very roof of the building. The doors swung closed behind us with a loud clack, as if to herald our arrival.

Five sets of shrewd and probing eyes met our arrival. The first thing I noticed was that all the other artists were woman and I was now the only man in the place. Once again I was an interloper.

I looked around. The space was bare and run down. The roof was held up by a trellis system made of wood. There was a double peaked skylight letting in sunlight. There was a ceiling mounted air unit that was chugging away noisily trying to heat the space. The floor was painted concrete but the white paint had been scrapped away in large measure. The walls were plywood, also painted white, and also scuffed away in parts, here and there covered with different coloured paints.

On the far wall, there was a plain clock, a back door and no window. An old fashion 1940's black telephone was mounted on the wall near the back door. To the left were shelves of art supplies and standing upright against the shelves were stacks of canvasses, some blank, most not. To the right a simple divider all but hide the washroom, which was the only interior room to the building at the rear corner of the space. There was a sink on the wall closest the washroom. The whole place probably dated back to the war years or at least the late 1940's.

Scattered around the centre of the room were a dozen well-used easels and tall three legged stools that were also covered in paint. The space smelled of oil paints and solvents. This was definitely an artist's studio.

Lauren greeted her compatriots curtly and introduced me to the other artists: Ingrid, Glynis, Meghan, Kristi and Karen. They were compatriots – somewhere between acquaintances and colleagues – but definitely not her friends. I sensed they hadn't been told that Lauren was "bringing a friend."

She squeezed my arm and then go. At that moment, I felt like an odd duckling of a child stepping into a sand-box of entitled kids for the first time, and by accident knocking over a sand-castle. But no bother, I was here, at least to say hello.

It is said you can tell a great deal about a person by what they wear and how they present themselves in public. As I looked at the gathered group I

measured them up. They were an eclectic and interesting brood. A ménage that probably went “Double Dutch” as far as their art was concerned.

Ingrid was perhaps the oldest of the bunch and the organizer of the session, and had a bored expression on her face, as if she was tired of the job. She was wearing a plain gray dress with pockets, with dabs of bright colours here and there – an artist’s garb.

Glynis wore a string of pearls over a simple blouse and skirt. She was dressed impeccably and did not strike me as a faculty member but more so a well to do housewife who did this as a lark or as a way to break her domestic dullness. Her eyes were inviting, and almost hungry. She walked up and took my hand when we were introduced, the only one of the five to do so.

Meghan, a big-boned and chubby girl of perhaps her mid-twenties, was dressed in well-worn jeans that drooped over her hips, and a comfortable grey sweat shirt, and sandals. She was smoking a cigarette and I could easily tell by her bits and bobs that she was only wearing her jeans and sweat short and nothing else underneath. She was definitely the easy-going type. She looked at me with the knowing eyes of someone who was well familiar with male physiology. She drew a long post-coital drag from her cigarette as if reminiscing.

Kristi had well coiffured, blonde hair and a powerful gaze with her grey-blue eyes. She wore a jump-suit that was strangely not covered in paint. Her eyes were penetrating and critical. I immediately and unambiguously sensed

she viewed my presence as an intrusion and with a great deal of feminine skepticism.

The youngest of the group was Karen. Karen visage didn't look a day over twelve. She had small hands and feet but her simple dress and well matched shoes and her ample figure told me that she was at least in her late teens.

After the introductions, Lauren walked over to one of the available easels and then we both waited a few minutes. The other artists were chatting amongst themselves and Lauren was making polite conversation with me.

I could tell that something was amiss. I thought it might be my presence but Ingrid was ill at ease for a different reason – she kept looking at her watch. About five minutes before the drawing session was scheduled to begin the telephone rang.

I was surprised by the shrill ring and knew immediately that it bode ill. Ingrid answered the phone. Everyone in the room could hear her side of the conversation. “You should have phoned sooner.” There was a trill of disappointment that rippled around the room. The model had not yet shown up.

Ingrid turned to face the people in the room as she spoke on the phone. “No ... it's too late to get a replacement.” We all listened a half minute or so. “I guess we will have to cancel ...bye.” Ingrid carefully put the telephone back on the cradle and paused a second.

“The model can’t come today. She’s mens …” Ingrid was looking at me as she said this and caught herself. “It’s her time of the month.” I of course knew what she was alluding to.

Ingrid turned to face the other artists. “We will have to cancel … ,” and nonchalantly continued,” unless one of you want to volunteer to model for us today.”

“Only if he leaves.” Kristi was biting in her words. She was pointing at me.

Lauren came to my defence. “I invited him. Why should he leave?”

“Because … I am not going to get naked with a man about.”

“Neither am I,” said Karen. To hear this from Kristi and Karen was no great surprise. Meghan was already putting her things away.

Glynis spoke up. “Why don’t we ask him to model for us? Sort of an initiation to our group.”

The room went silent. Here was the arsonist’s dilemma in its artistic version. Two arsonists are in a closed room, each with a match and the floor is covered in gasoline. Neither arsonist wants to miss the fun, but neither can safely strike the match. If I said no … I would not be allowed back. If I said yes … well … I was not quite sure what would happen.

I gave Glynis the evil eye. She smiled mischievously.

It was then that I noticed that Lauren was silent and watching me with some trepidation. If I said no she would lose stature with the compatriots. If I said yes, I was unsure how she would react, but knew the others would hold her in higher esteem.

I stood there silent for a moment, rather self-conscious and studied the faces of the six women. Even Kristi had an air of expectation.

I felt a bit of discomfort, well, to be honest a great deal of it.

“It’s all in the name of art ...”, Kristi said. I was surprised in her soft tone for I had sensed a few minutes before a great deal of animosity towards me.

Meghan spoke up next, “we haven’t had a male model ... at least while I have been coming ...”

The six of them were presenting their best case. I heard Glynis say “that would be a change ... I am tired or drawing women.”

Karen spoke next ...almost in a whisper “I have never drawn a male figure before ... or even seen a naked man ...” That was a bold admission on her part. The other women looked at her in astonishment.

I glanced at her and smiled. Her face was crimson red and glowing with embarrassment. We were in the same boat, so to speak for I had never seen a naked woman before.

For the last few minutes my blood pressure was steadily climbing as was a physiological response. Without looking down I wondered if this was becoming apparent.

Lauren had been watching me closely and I suspect she knew. She spoke up “think of how special this can be!” When she said this I felt both trapped and set up. If I said no than I would never be able to come draw with the group, and she knew it.

She was being very presumptuous. I looked at her and then a thought came to mind. I leaned over and whispered something in her ear. She step back with a start. I turned to the group with a smile.

It was Ingrid who asked for the group. “What did he say?”

Lauren looked at me with a smirk. “He said he won’t model alone. It’s Adam and Eve … or Adam leaves Paradise.” Lauren looked at me with irritation. The five other women just laughed.

They hadn’t thought I would be so cheeky. “And so … who will join me?” I studied the faces of the others.

It was Glynis who suggested that this was only fair. I wondered if she was volunteering. Karen stuttered when she said “how will we decide?” Ingrid said “not me!” The others remained silent.

Lauren looked at me as she asked, “so how are we to decide?” As she asked me this I could see that her mouth stood half-opened and her eyes were half-closed.

Warm blood was pulsating through my veins, and there was a gentle singing in my ears. I knew to take this one step at a time. I shrugged my shoulders.

Ingrid smiled and then turned to her easel and disappeared for a moment. When she reappeared she was holding five pencils upright in her left hand. “Shortest pencil … models as Eve.” There she was getting into the spirit of the occasion.

The first to draw was Kristi, but she drew a long pencil. Next was Karen, another long. That left three pencils. Glynis drew a third long. That left Meghan and Lauren. Ingrid offered the two remaining choices to Meghan. She drew a long.

Then Ingrid handed the last pencil to Lauren it was a short. Kristi was pleased and exclaimed “it seems only fair … eh Lauren.” The others were strangely silent. I sensed their disappointment as they returned to their easels to get ready to draw.

I looked into Lauren's face. She was frightened expression but not because I would see her in the raw. "What are you worried about?" I quietly asked her.

"I have never modeled before...." She was short of breath and losing composure. She was to stand in judgment, naked before her compatriots. To be naked in front of strangers is anonymous, to be naked in front of her compatriots was a form of punishment. I could see that in her eyes. The tables had been turned by fate and she was about to experience original sin. I felt a pang of sorry for her.

Now I felt less discomfort, for the woman did not know me for Adam. "Neither have I ... "I held out my hand to her and said , "but it looks like we are in this together." I was to be lead into Paradise..

"You can disrobe behind the divider or in the washroom," Ingrid pointed to the corner of the room closest to the washroom. I motioned with my hand and Lauren knew the choice was hers. I somehow knew that if I went into the washroom I would probably lock the door and not come out. The divider wasn't much of a comfort either.

Lauren said that she would use the washroom ... and disappeared in the blink of an eye leaving me by myself at the centre of the room.

Well, I thought, this is it. I walked over to an easel and checked to see the paint was dry on its surface. Then I slowly took off my coat, sweater and tie off and hung them over the unused easel.

I reached down and undid my shoe laces and removed my shoes and my socks. The floor was cold. It was then that I sensed someone was standing behind me and slowly turned.

It was Karen holding a folded pale blue blanket, which she handed to me. “Ingrid said you might need this to keep warm.”

I took the blanket and thanked her. She stood for a moment, struggling to say something. “If you don’t want me to stay, I will leave.” She was shyly looking down as she asked.

“If you want to stay …”. She looked up at me. She had a worried look on her face. She didn’t say anything. “Have you seen pictures of Michel Angelo’s paintings on the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel, or his David in Florence?”

She nodded.

“Why are you so worried then?” As we spoke I started to undo the buttons on my shirt.

“This is different …”

I took off my shirt.

“How is this different?” I asked.

She watched me as I undid the buckle of my belt. Her pupils began to dilate wide. I could see a vein on the side of her neck begin to pulse and her cheeks begin to flush.

“Please … stay.” I don’t know why I said please. Or why it mattered to me that she would stay. The whole experience for me was both complicated and surreal.

She turned around and walked back to her easel. I turned my back to the room and dropped my pants then stood. One more piece of clothing and I was back into a primitive state. Given the amount of hair on my body I guess it could be called a primate state as well.

I dropped the last piece of clothing, still with my back to the room. While I was partly hidden behind the easel, it would be evident to the artists that Adam had arrived.

Perhaps it was the cold, or perhaps it was the excitement, but as I stood with my back to the room I began to have goose bumps, and a warm and indescribable feeling started to flood my body – endorphins. I was getting high on fear, or was it desire?

I bent down and picked up the blanket, and with it strategically placed in front of me (but not touching me mind you for I didn't know where that blanket had been) I turned around and marched to the centre of the room. There five pairs of eyes watched me with hungry anticipation.

I stood there quite alone and quite naked. I let the blanket drop to the floor. But it disappointed the five women, for before I let the blanket fall out of modesty, and the need to hide my arousal, I had placed a hand over my naughty bits. I cupped my pouch in my hand ...and my arousal ran passed my wrist by some inches but was well hidden behind my arm.

Her timing could not have been better for as I now stood defenceless in front of the others, Eve appeared, wrapped in a robe mind you. She saw me there at the centre of the room and paused.

Ingrid piped in. "Good now we can begin."

Lauren had the robe tightly wound around her. Her hair was down and I could see she was in her bare feet. I could also see she found the floor cold. Lauren's face almost solemn. I smiled, "come stand on the blanket the floor is cold," I said.

Lauren hesitated for a moment as she studied me and then opened the robe as if Venus stepping from the oyster shell. Her figure bounded out from

behind the robe. She let the robe drop to the floor. I opened my mouth in awe. What an entrance!

She slowly and enticingly promenaded to the centre of the room. As she did this I watched both her and the others watch her in some amazement. Her brown eyes peered intently into mine and nowhere else.

She took her time and all but ignored the others. I could feel her heat and intensity from across the room. She was having fun, far more fun than I was having I could tell you. I was getting hot too ... too hot.

After what seemed like an eternity, for I swear time had slowed, she stood beside me and looked down at my modest hand.

Slowly she reached across my body with her hand and lifted my hand away from my modesty, brushing her fingers across me. I nearly lost my composure and I suspected she knew that.

As I stood there bare as the day I was born I was so overwhelmed I had to close my eyes and count to one hundred. With my eyes closed my other senses became acute. I could hear the eager pencil moving on paper and a hungry paint brush being dipped into watercolours. It is strange what your mind does when you are under duress and your eyes are closed.

For a split second I felt myself lift out of my body so that I was looking down from above. I soared around the room, an angel looking over the

artist's shoulders watching them as they watched me – watching them as they drew their conté or painted their water colours.

Ingrid was sketching broad lines. Glynis had started with my portrait. Meghan was painting an abstract with her water colours – damned if I could see a man and woman in it. Kristi was drawing the beauty of Lauren and ignoring me. Karen was lingering over my masculinity and was sketching it carefully, slowly drawing it to fill the page.

Even though I knew my accension to be a surreal dream, I began to shiver. Lauren noticed this and asked "are you ok?" I think it was the endorphins but I felt very cold. Psychedelic patterns were appearing in diverging waves across my closed eyelids. I had never experienced this before.

I still had my eyes closed and heard Ingrid's voice. "Maybe we should get him to sit. It is cold in here."

I could hear motion near me but did not open my eyes. Then I felt Lauren guide me to a seat. When I opened my eyes there she was turned to me and I was transfixed peering up at her.

I was in a Reuben's painting. It was the most amazing sight – the temptress Eve holding my hand and standing before me. Her hair went down past her backside. Her awe-inspiring breasts swayed before me like two luscious sinful pears waiting to be picked. Her femininity was no longer hidden away but stood as two pink petals in a succulent garden.

My shuddering slowly ebbed as a deep and abiding warmth cursed through my veins. I no longer felt naked and vulnerable for I had been transformed into Adam in a modern version of the Garden of Eden with the Fall of Man as painted by Jan Brueghel the Elder and Pieter Paul Reubens in the 17th century.

Just then the doors to the building opened and there stood Lauren's love sick mathematician. Lauren had her back turned to the door and all he could see was her posterior. He took one look at Lauren standing there as naked as Eve in the Garden of Eden and yelled his anger at her in the fashion of a *mouton enragé* (as the French would say) and then slammed the door with a loud clack.

I looked up at her with concern, but Lauren had a remarkable smile on her face. As I admired her serene composure, Eve leaned down, her beautiful breasts blocking my view of the rest of the room.

I looked deep into her eyes. The pupils were wide and her eyes warm and inviting. They exuded such power over me. It was then that she whispered into my ear, "... Hello ... Beautiful!"

And what happened next was quite involuntary, that I can assure you. With those two ingenuous words, and in a fit of sublime awkwardness, I stalwartly and passionately lost my composure.

Chapter Two: Enjoying the Attention

Our flesh is the frailest of our virtues – yet we expect it to be our strongest. I had beheld, in a mixture of anxiety and ecstasy, as matters took its own course, but thankfully my outburst had been met by joyous shrieks and not jeering scorn. Their jubilance set an air of blissful rapture to the moment. It inspired them in their art and their creativity. I was no longer merely an interloper here but the central object of their artful desire.

Despite the fitful episode, and the inevitable making good, even the hard-boiled Kristi found heart for a small measure of kind-heartedness, if not some form of private appetite. What that appetite might be I did not know. She was harder to read than the others.

Here I was now alone, for Lauren had abandoned me to my own devices. It was hard to describe how I felt at that moment both self-conscious and ill at ease. I felt utterly naked and completely vulnerable.

As I perched precariously on the high stool, I sat crumpled in a ball, with my legs gathered in my arms. I looked down and carefully studied my shadow on the floor. My shadow appeared as like Rodin's thinker – rather appropriate ... I moved some toes on my foot and saw my shadow wave back. That made me feel even more insular.

Strangely enough, it was Lauren who I felt more concerned about at that moment than myself. Within seconds of my loss of composure she had wrapped herself in her robe and had scurried into the washroom to efface my

frenzy. What should have taken a moment or two dragged out to three and four. I looked up at the shut washroom door and try to imagine how Lauren was and what might be taking so much time.

And then there were the others. As I sat there I tried to take in the emotions of the five artists.

Ingrid had a broad smile on her face as she drew— the drawing session had turned out to be far more rife with creativity than would have happened with the model that did not show up. This gathering would be a topic of conversation over coffee with her artist friends.

Glynis just sat, absent minded, thinking, in a world of her own making. I wondered if she was staring at a blank piece of paper. She fingered her pearls as she thought. Then she looked up at me which drew her back to this world and began to sketch.

Meghan was now entirely immersed in her abstract art. With her cigarette belching smoke, she laboured at her easel as a locomotive might toil climbing a steep hill. She struck me as a narcissist and a surrealist, sort of a Jean-Paulette Satire.

Karen gawked at me, not that she could see much of me as I sat crumpled on the stool. Her hand moved deliberately and autonomously before her easel. She had a delightful expression on her face – a mixture between bewilderment and contentment.

Kristi, the odd one out, eyed her compatriots with an uncompromising sternness as she painted with her watercolours. Perhaps it was because she had loved a lot, to no good end, and she was already cynical towards the world, or perhaps she was a misanthrope – or even a misandrist.

The ice had been melted and the gathering had an energy that was not there when this sketching session had begun. Even the sun had begun to shine warmly down through the skylight above.

I smiled as Meghan lit a fresh cigarette. If this were a black and white movie – a *film noir* perhaps – then the inevitable cigarette would be the hero’s reward for his ebullience, but since I didn’t smoke, it was the ersatz reaction by her that triggered it. The smoke drifted up into the skylight, catching rays as it ascended.

Then it hit me – the exhaustion the French call *le petit mort* – the little death. I think Glynis sensed this, for as she peered down at me she suggested she wanted to draw “the model’s back” (her words exactly) so without further prompting and while still seated on the stool I turned around, placed my hands in my lap and closed my eyes.

My back and neck was sore. With my left hand I rubbed the top of my neck and stretched. I tried to keep my spine straight without stiffness or discomfort, but this was rather difficult for me for reasons that will soon become apparent.

As I modeled with my back to the others, I slowly regained my poise. In front of these artists and their art I was no longer naked and vulnerable, but instead now felt obligated, if not by a sense of presence then by a sense of personal pride, to stay and model until the end of the drawing session.

But in a blink of an eye my courage might evaporate – everything hinged on Lauren. It was about five minutes before Lauren emerged from the washroom. When the door opened I glanced over my shoulder. This time, though, Lauren did not bound into the centre of the room, but spent a few minutes visiting with each of her compatriots, talking softly with them and studying their artwork.

She visited with Karen first, but only for a moment then had moved on. She was now in an animate conversation with Kristi. From across the room I could not hear what they were saying. From time to time I glanced over my shoulder. I looked over at the clock. The second hand was barely moving on the clock – time was taking its time. We had over an hour left in the drawing session.

I kept my back to Lauren and her compatriots and began to wonder why she was leaving me here sitting all by myself. I closed my eyes again and tried hard to make out a smattering of words that drifted across the room. I heard a giggle followed by the word “wonderful”, spoken by Kristi to Lauren.

I swiftly looked over my shoulder but Lauren deliberately avoided looking back at me. That one word from Kristi angered me ... perhaps they were playing me and this life was just one long dirty trick. Perhaps she sensed my angst for she wrapped her robe even more tightly around herself, and crossed her hands across her chest.

In that instant I had an odd feeling that I had become a prized butterfly trapped ... drugged ... and slowly becoming numb inside his specimen jar. They could look in but he could not flutter about. Perhaps obligation was not that binding.

Karen looked up from her easel then glanced at Lauren and Kristi, and then up at me. Lauren had her back to her and was also blocking Kristi's view of Karen and her easel. Karen gave a warm smile. I responded by slowly glancing shyly down to the floor and turned back. When I looked up I was facing the two large doors.

The doors were ajar by an inch or two and I could see thin and moving slivers of people walking past the building on the sidewalk, perhaps five yards beyond the door. Thankfully none of these people knew what was transpiring in the non-descript building they were walking past.

Then someone appeared next to me on my left. It was Karen with her drawing in hand. If there was a person who was ebullient with friendliness in the room it was Karen – here was someone with an affection for all the goodness in life, tinged perhaps with a degree of inner loneliness.

I looked up at her and her drawing and whispered “aren’t you glad you stayed.” Karen smiled in an inviting way and I smiled back. I sensed that her goodness was as natural as her breathing.

She held up her drawing for me to study. It was a rough sketch of my back, with some detail here and there. The drawing was a quick sketch and the contour was darker than the internal lines.

“May I?” She did not say anything as I took her drawing. I looked at the drawing for a few seconds and then up at her and in her eyes could see her arousal. I had never seen irises so large and alive. Her eyes were hungry.

As I looked up at her slowly and furtively two prominences, the diameter of dimes nearly hidden within the patterns of her blue and white checkered dress, appeared at the tips of her breasts. I noticed without looking, not taking my eyes off hers. But she knew that I knew how alive she felt.

She had stepped forward not to show me her drawing but because she wanted to flirt, even philander, with me. Two can play at the artistry of life, I thought. Oh ... philia ... I began a slow tease.

As we conversed she stood beside me with her body half turned to the others. She was peering down at my masculinity, or at least that bit that was barely visible.

I drew my legs together and laid her drawing across my lap and continued making polite conversation. “It’s lovely.” I could tell that she was now a bit more confident with her sketching.

“And you said you have never drawn a male figure before.”

“Never …” Her words came out breathlessly. “This is my first time.”

I pointed to the line she had drawn of my spine. Somehow it looked incomplete, and unconvincing, almost hesitant and so I told her. She pointed at it the top of the line defining my spine. In doing so her finger had touched the tip of me, without her knowing.

I lifted her drawing off my lap. “They say we should draw the model from the inside out.” She said this loud enough for everyone in the room to hear her. As she said this, Karen was looking past the lower edge of her drawing. Then I think she realized what had just happened.

“Really.”

Immediately a mischievous thought came to mind. I opened my legs a bit to bait her and then I took her pointer finger on her right hand , guided her right hand over my head and placed it at the top of my spine, at the base of my skull.

Loud enough for the others to hear I said to her “trace your finger slowly down my spine and find the vertebrae, and imagine how you might better draw my spine.”

The look of surprise on her face was indescribable. She paused ... “You really think I might do that?”

I nodded.

“You don’t mind?”

“No ... if this will help you become a better artist ... go ahead.”

I took her drawing and rolled it up and held it in the hand closest to her. Then I lay that arm with the hand holding her drawing across my lap. Now she would have no choice but to concentrate her gaze elsewhere.

While still standing beside me, she leaned over my back and started to slowly explore my vertebrae beginning with the base of my skull. While she did this, her other arm brushed lightly and hesitantly against my leg. I suddenly reached for that arm with my free hand, my right one, and guided her hand onto the top of my thigh and kept my hand on top of hers so that she could not draw away.

Her hand froze. It was very warm and I swear I could feel her pulse on my thigh through the palm of her hand. I did not look down for fear of

betraying my intimacy to the others in the room, but out of the corner of my eye I could see that her hand was petite and her fingernails were painted with a subdued pink.

She did not draw her hand away, but slowly continued her tracing of the vertebrae with her right hand. I could feel her hand on my back get progressively warmer as well.

Then I realized that we were now in a sort of a game. She traced a shape on my spine and I reciprocated. With my finger of my right hand I started to trace shapes on her hand. She traced a heart. I traced a smile in return.

“Take your time,” I said it loud enough for the others in the room to hear,
“... studying my back”

Her hand on my thigh stirred. She understood. I slightly lifted my right hand off hers and left her hand to move free. Almost as if drawn by gravity, her hand slipping down my thigh. Without a word, understandingly, her petite hand made a slow, languid, and elegant gesture towards undiscovered country. Her thumb brushed against my masculinity and she stopped again.

I stirred. She moved her hand away. I slowly guided her hand back, and then a bit further. The most basic involuntary response that babies have is to grasp a finger offered them. It was delicious.

With her other hand she had reached the middle of my spine and was leaning further forward. With her fingers she was tickling my lower spine. The goose bumps blossomed. Leaning forward meant that she could scoop me up with her left hand, which she did in one agonizingly slow spooning of her hand. Everything that made me a man was now hers.

“My, my.” she whispered. “That’s so beautiful ...”

“It is isn’t it.” I whispered back. “but not half as beautiful as that what makes you ... you ...”.

She shifted, almost losing her balance. She leaned into me and I could feel the coins. They had become quarters. With my finger I started to move one of her fingers to tickle me at the bottom of my change purse.

“You’re so soft ... “ her words were barely audible “and warm.” She shifted my pennies back and forth with her fingers. Her other fingers were now nearly at the base of my spine. Time was running out for our little tryst.

Then a thought came to mind. “Sign your drawing for me and give me your number” I wanted to play the tempter for her, “and I will call you.”

“You will ...”, she was surprised. She slowly stood up. She fleetingly glanced down and beheld what until a few moments ago had been a complete mystery to her. This caused her to lose a little of her nerve, so she quickly turned back to the study of my spine.

Her fingers on my spine were now at my coccyx, while the fingers on the other hand was, unbeknownst to all others in the room, voyaging about my body's antipodal node – the nethermost place of me.

As our intimate encounter played out we continued to speak only in whispers. “Aren’t you with Lauren?” she asked

I did not answer at once, but dallied to feed her curiosity. “What makes you think that?”

“She brought you here.” Her query was immediate.

“She’s just an acquaintance from a class we are both taking.” I let the words sink in before continuing. “I told her I like art and so she invited me to come to try my hand at drawing, nothing else.”

This seems to have set her mind to rest. “So you are just friends?”

“Not even that.” I paused and shifting a bit. “I think she sees me as something between a classmate,” I plotted along, “and perhaps a distraction from her boyfriend.”

My candour surprised her. “Oh ...really” there was a twinge of excitement in her rejoinder. I didn’t tell her that perhaps I was just Lauren’s flavour of the month.

“Would you like to have me ...,” As I asked her this I took her hand and gave it and what it was beholding a squeeze, “as a model.’

“Yes ...” She straightened up and looked down at me and continued, “I would ...” She giggled.

From across the room Lauren asked “what are you giggling about?” Karen moved her hands back from me. I looked back over my shoulder. Our tryst had come to an end.

“She was asking me about my spine.” I responded. “She noticed my back is not straight.” I said this as nonchalantly as possible, not to betray our shared confidence. “I hurt my neck and spine last year.”

“Oh ... I didn’t know that,” Lauren replied.

It was then that Ingrid commanded “You should let us all look at your spine? We should do an anatomical study of you”

Kristi looked up and agreed, “yes ... lets.” I bowed my head more as a submission than an acknowledgment.

Although not discouraged by Kristi’s remark, Karen took her cue from Ingrid’s. “Thank you, that was very helpful.” This time she didn’t whisper.

“now I can better draw you.” Everyone in the room could clearly hear what she said, but did not understand what she meant.

I looked up at Karen. I did not think her irises could get any bigger but her pupils were as big as dinner plates. She could have said better draw your back but she said something much more universal – “*I can better draw you*``. Karen and I understood each other.

I handed her back her drawing and said, “go and draw me a better drawing of spine.”

She looked back at me. “You know the top of your spine is quite serpentine.”

“I know .. I am being treated for the injury and am not fully recovered.”

“Poor you” she said placing her now free hand on my shoulder. I patted it with mine.

“Don’t worry I will manage.”

From behind me I heard Glynis say “you seem healthy enough.”

With those words, Karen departed. I turned myself partially around on the stool to face the rest of the room and watched as Karen walked back to her easel to set back to work. As she walked under the skylight the sun shone on

her hair creating a halo of sorts. I could just make out Karen's silhouette through her dress, including that remarkable gap that differentiates female from male. As she walked across the room it was as if I was noticing her for the first time. Elle etait en jeu et anjou.

I turned back to face the door and stretched my arms and shoulders and went back to once again watching the people walking by through the narrow crack in the door. I began to think that the moving images were a sort of allegory for life, and how we really only see a thin sliver of other people in passing.

Just then Lauren appeared beside me wrapped tightly in her robe. I sheepishly looked up at her.

She placed her hand on my arm. "I am so sorry ..." she said with sincerity. I could sense the same sentiment in her eyes. I put my hand on hers but didn't say anything. I wanted to let her to continue.

"Can you forgive me?

I shrugged my shoulders. "What is there to forgive?"

"I embarrassed you." There was something refreshingly honest in how she said that.

"Did you?" She had but I wasn't going to admit it. With nothing on, only my words could cover me. I don't think she expected such a banal response

from me. She just stood looking at me. Her eyes were warm but somewhat tired.

“I should be thanking you shouldn’t I?”

“Why?”

I shrugged my shoulders and gave an impish smile.

“Oh …” She giggled.

“And how are you feeling?”

“A bit whacked.”

“Whacked?” I had never heard the expression before.

“Worn out.”

“Did I do that to you?”

“Well, yes … and no. I had the big O …” I looked at her inquisitively.

“An orgasm … the big O” she motioned in the washroom with her thumb.”

“It lasted five minutes at least … I am still shivering.”

I smiled knowingly at her. “That’s why you vanished for so long.”

She bit her lip and nodded. “First time ever … I don’t dare get naked. I am swollen and enflamed. They would notice that immediately.”

“Me too …here sit for a while. I need to pee.” I stood up and said loud enough for everyone in the room to hear.

As I stood I once again covered myself to hide my arousal, by placing a hand over my naughty bits. I cupped my hand and well hide myself behind my wrist.

Lauren in turn opened her robe and slipped it off her shoulders. “Do you want my robe?” I stole a peek then shook my head. She folded the robe, then sat facing the others and set it down on her lap. As she sat there she reminded me of Matisse’s painting Carmalita.

After she had sat herself down I leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. I don’t really know why I did that, but she appreciated the gesture. My body felt richly warm all over.

I then turned and promenaded through the throng, not caring that I was patently immodest. It was my turn to giggle, but it was internal.

As I walked through Glynis looked up with a start from her easel. "You gigolo you." It was then that I first appreciated her wicked and truthful sense of humour.

I walked through the middle of the throng of easels and turned to the right parading past Kristi and Karen. As I marched past her, Kristi studied me from head to foot and frowned disapprovingly. I ignored her. As I walked by Karen I smiled and winked at her letting my hand drop and then stepped into the washroom. All she might have got was a very brief glimpse but it would have been enough to again get her blood racing.

I turned around, now perched behind the door and saw all six of the women looking at me as I slowly and with a sense of *Noblesse Royale* closed the door behind me. I was now alone, in the dark coolness of the washroom.

I turned around and leaned back onto the washroom door. Like the floor the door felt cold against my skin. I let out a long sigh. "What am I doing?" I whispered to myself.

I waited a moment before deciding whether or not to turn on the light. The light coming from under the door was just enough for me to see myself in the old French-silvered mirror, so I decided not to turn the light on – at least not yet. In the twilight of the room I looked like an apparition.

I had expected the room to be odorous, but it was clean and fragrant with the scent of lavender. In the dim light I could see that there was a water closet

to the right and an old fashion pedestal sink, with old fashion faucets, in the centre of the opposite wall.

On the wall to the left was a two- tier wooden shelf that had folded white towels of different sizes on it, and sitting beneath the shelf on the floor was a wicker hamper. Beside the pedestal sink in the left hand corner of the washroom was a small shower with a pull round curtain, and a pull ring to an overhead shower head, something that you rarely ever see any more except in emergency showers in laboratories. On the wall behind the door were clothes pegs from which were hanging Lauren's clothes and an extra robe.

The entire room was functional, practical and well kept. I could imagine the women model's expecting no less. I sensed the smell of lavender, and another whiff of some sort of familiar perfume. I had sensed it before, hidden amongst the aromas of the cafeteria. I turned around and found that that second fragrance came from Lauren's clothes. I brought my nose close to the collar of her blouse and smiled – of course, Chanel Number 5. In the smallness of the room her perfume quickly over powered the soap scent.

Being self-conscious I turned the hot water tap on and then lifted the lid and seat on the water closet and watered the flowers. The expression came from my youth when I would, when necessity dictated, sneak behind a convenient tree to relieve myself. I set the seat and lid down then pulled the lever. I hoped the sound of the hot water flowing from the faucet deadened the sounds.

Then it struck me. Why should it matter? There was no need to be immodest was there. The plumbing was all but apparent by this point in time, spigot and all.

The water coming from the tap was hot and so I turned it down and mixed in some cold. Then I took one of the small hand towels and some soap and cleaned away the last vestiges of my excitement. The warmth felt delicious. I splashed some warm water on my face and dried my face off with the edge of the towel. Then I placed my towel on the edge of the hamper to dry.

I stretched. The normally excruciating pain in my neck and back was fighting with the endorphins that my body had released of late. Exhaustion was also beginning to kick in. Why must there always be something to take the joy out of my life?

I leaned forward and perched before the mirror with one hand on each side of the pedestal sink and studied my ghostly reflection in the mirror. The shadows were quite revealing.

I stood up and tried to see myself through their eyes. I was not broad shouldered nor even handsome by any measure. I had played sports and so my physique was there but I was no Hercules. My strength was my intellect. I was a bit slender.

I peered downwards and wondered if they thought me to be suitably endowed – and whether that was what it was that they found most alluring. The cold had once again taken hold. I smiled. In the great game of life ... does size really matter?

There was a knock at the door and a voice. “Are you ok in there?” It was Lauren. I was going to say I am coming, but I stopped myself in the nick of time. “Be there in a sec ...” I would not be able to live down the double-entendre with her if I had.

I gathered my wits then turned around and was about to open the door when I spied her brassiere hanging over a peg next to the door. It was a remarkable piece of apparel, with frilly bits meant for a real filly. I reached up and touched the fabric and smiled. It was expensive Italian silk. Yes, she does have European tastes.

I draped my hand across my gender, hoping the heat of my hand would bring me one again in full bloom, and then slowly opened the door to be hailed by six pairs of alluring eyes.

Yes, I admit ... I was enjoying the attention.

Chapter Three: A Study in Anatomy

When I stepped back out into the room it was clear that in my brief absence they had sorted out my fate. Someone had put on some classical music, Vivaldi I think. The music was perhaps meant to calm the savage beast.

The smile on Lauren's face said 'please trust me'. She offered me her hand and I took it. I walked with her past the others to the centre of the room. There on the floor lay a piece of brown foolscap paper perhaps four feet wide by seven feet long.

I stopped some distance back and looked at Lauren inquisitively, without saying a thing. She had a reassuring 'don't be shy ... come hither' look on her face and tugged at my hand. In the small of my back I felt someone's petite hands coax me on. I suspected it was Karen's.

Still, I stood still. I fidgeted like a prisoner before his judge. Then some more hands patted my bare backside.

Still I stood as mutton. Then someone pinched me, and I trod ahead with a start. Without looking back I figured only Glynis would have such cheek and prod me ahead in this fashion.

And so – like a lamb being led to his sacrifice – I trudged on with Lauren pulling me ahead and eager hands pushing me from behind. She led me to the foot of the foolscap. It was then that I looked down and saw that women's partial contour had already been traced on the paper. It was of the

left side of her body. I guess I was to be the right side of the tracing – Eve and Adam set onto the great draughting table known as life.

I smirked and wondered if this was how God once set upon the task – Day Three of Creation: list of things to do today

- design Eve (win award for perfection)
- design Adam (with extra bits and pieces)
- makes sure tab B fits in slot A (with some tolerance)
- pick up a litre of milk (fat free),
- pay the utility bill (overdue – disconnect pending).

“You?”

Lauren nodded enthusiastically. So she was intimately part of the conspiracy. I looked down at the tracing. It had been done quickly and was incomplete. It showed the outside of her left torso, hip and leg. I motioned with my hand to go and finish the tracing. She shook her head and so did one or two of her compatriots. I was it I guess.

Next to the foolscap paper was an artist’s anatomical book turned to a page that showed the human pelvis – in particular, the difference between the male and female pelvis. I could see that the anatomy book had an aged, pale blue cover.

At the end of our drawing session I was given the book as a reward for being so accommodating, or perhaps as an enticement to get me to come back again. The book was a 1942 fifth printing of *Anatomy and Drawing* by Victor Perard – quite an old gem (I still have the book in my collection).

Lauren turned me around so that I had my back to the paper. She directed me back with two baby steps onto the foolscap paper and then guided me carefully down onto my back. I held onto my modesty for as long as possible.

When I was flat on my back I looked up and there gathered around me in a semi-circle was an entourage of enchantresses. They all looked pleased with the circumstances, but it was Kristi who was smirking the broadest. She held up a marker. Lauren saw that I was looking up at her and so she did as well. “It was Kristi’s idea”. Lauren stated the obvious.

I was to be their anatomical study but not in the traditional sense that a model in an art session would be used. Obviously they wanted to study my skeleton in intimate detail.

The coldness of the floor soaked through the paper. “The floor is cold,” I protested.

“Can’t be helped,” said Kristi, “we need to trace you on the hard surface.” While Kristi held a marker, the others each held a drawing pencil.

Lauren, who had remained behind me as I set down on my back, now knelt down at my head. The others kneeled down around me. Only Ingrid remained standing. She sat on one of the tall stools.

Then Lauren leaned over me and lifted my hand clear from my modesty. I did not challenge her as she did this for, outnumbered as I was, it was obviously a futile gesture.

Lauren then began to line me up on the paper. I was taller than she was and so I was curious how I would be aligned. Obviously I was to be aligned but not to her head or her feet. Perhaps it was the awkwardness of the moment but Lauren was not having much success and so it was Kristi that took over.

Kristi set down the open book covering my masculinity. She looked at the drawing of the human pelvis and then carefully at my pelvis, and then with her fingers traced the top of the great trochanter (the top of the bone of the leg or femur) and where it entered the hollow for the head of the femur on my pelvis. It hurt as she did this, not merely because she had long nails and was pressing hard but because I had injured my right hip, along with my neck and spine.

“Move up a bit,” Kristi said and I leaned up on my elbows and squirmed a bit. “There ... lay back and let us move you about” They moved my hands and feet and I complied. My acquiescence was complete. I looked up to find Lauren at my head, Karen at my feet, and Glynis at my left and Kristi at my pelvis to the right.

I was surrounded by a warren of ardent artists as they set about their work. Kristi began by tracing my contour starting at my right knees and then around my body up to just past my right pelvis. She guided herself by moving her hand along the bones of my tibia and patella.

Then Kristi handed the marker to Glynis, which surprised me for she was kneeling across from Kristi. Glynis was surprised too, but since Kristi was in charge of this endeavour she silently took the marker. I thought Lauren would be next, but then again they were just doing one-half of the tracing.

Glynis leaned over me and placed her right hand beside my body. Her pearls hung down and swung pendulously across and just above my body as she moved. They set the air in motion and I could feel the moving air caress my chest. She looked down at me as she slowly traced out my right torso, carefully moving her fingers along as the marker in her hand traced me out on the foolscap. Her fingers were tickling me and she knew it. She went up to my underarm and along a bit further. Glynis stopped at my right inner elbow, smiled and then bubbled "that was fun." She handed the marker to Lauren.

Lauren took the marker then leaned forward and for a brief instance I was deep within her robe. The fragrance of her was overwhelming. I could feel her drawing my inner arm from my elbow to my wrist. Then she leaned back as she drew my outer arm and shoulder. I watched her as she did this. She had superb hand-eye coordination, drawing the tracing in one fluid

movement. I looked at her hands for the first time and saw they were long and graceful and wondered if she played the piano. I would later find out she did, and quite well too.

Lauren looked down at me as she again leaned forward burying me in her robe. I could feel her swiftly and deftly draw the fingers on my right hand. When she reappeared I looked up at her and smiled as she traced the contour of my head and then my left shoulder. She knew what she was doing.

The Lauren sat back when she was finished and then glanced at Kristi. Kristi lifted the anatomy book off me and set it down on the floor next to her and then turned her head and nodded at Karen.

Lauren held up the marker for Karen, offering it to her but stayed put. So that's how this game is being played. The hen pecking order was being set by the order they took the marker – the order in which they drew. It was a sort of cladogram. Girls and their games!

Karen had to spread her legs and set her knees nearly outside of mine so that she could lean forward to take the marker from Lauren. If she had not done this she would fallen right on top of me.

As she leaned lengthwise over me and reached across for the marker, her dress caressed my body. Her knees also locked against mine. She leaned a bit further than she really needed but I didn't mind. I understood she wanted to savour the deliciousness of the moment.

Karen took the marker from Lauren and then placed herself over me as she started to trace the remaining bit of contour of my body. Her dress lay draped over my feet.

Her path was now clear. I could tell by her deportment that she knew she would again have the best pleasure of them all.

Slowly she traced around the heel of my foot before she proceeded up the inside of my right leg and stopped just as she was about to touch my intimates. She looked around but no one moved.

“Shall I ...” I asked and was just about the move my right arm when Kristi held down that arm with her leg. Before I could move my left arm, Glynis had done the same to that one as well. I felt like a trapped specimen, a butterfly with his wings pinned back. My wings were now immobile and I could not move my legs either.

Karen watched as they immobilized my arms. She was apprehensive as she looked down at me. I glanced down at myself and grinned boyishly. Still she did nothing.

“Well ... “ Kristi edged her on. “What are you waiting for?”

When she remained still, Kristi abruptly swatted my intimates out of the way with the back of her hand and then said, “... finish the tracing.”

I turned my head abruptly “Ow … stop that” and mocked Kristi for what she had just done.

She looked down at me. “That didn’t hurt!” She mocked me in return.

“How would you know?” I motioned to her groin with my eyes. “How would you like it if someone swatted you down there!”

“How do you know I wouldn’t enjoy that …” Kristi had a wicked smile when she retorted. Then she held up her hand and I saw her long red fingernails. She wouldn’t. She did!

Kristi flicked me with her fingers. Not just any flick, but a strong flick that could only come from plenty or practice. It was maybe the tom-boy in her. Unlike the naughty swat, this time it really did sting. I gave her an angry look but didn’t say a thing. I didn’t want to egg her on lest she flick me a few times more. She had a mischievous smirk on her face and was glancing down at me.

I followed her eyes and looked down and could see a red welt on my appendage. Then I grimaced at her and gave her an apprehensive face. She lifted her hand and cocked her fingers and was about to give me another flick when I yelled “… stop … please … no.”

Her hand approached me and I got ready for the pain, but it never came. She un-cocked her hand, and tittered, halfway between a laugh and a giggle. “I could learn to love this.”

Lauren interceded. “Stop that! Or he might get up and leave.” I looked up at Lauren and smiled a rather feeble grim. She felt sorry for me or perhaps it was that she felt the need to reassert her claim to me.

“Thanks,” I meekly croaked as I responded to Lauren’s intercession. “I think I am stuck here.”

Karen continued with the tracing of me, right up my leg to my pelvis where Kristi waited to take back the marker.

At this point my arms were freed, and I began to move about. Lauren tapped me on the shoulder. “Stay put. We are going to trace the bone of your pelvis first.”

“Then what?”

“We’ll see. Maybe you’re the bones in your legs next, then your spine.

Kristi then began to probe my pelvis. Starting from the bottom upwards she searched for the iliac crest on the bone of my right pelvis. As she did this she referred to the anatomy book as she traced the bone on the paper underneath me.

As she proceeded inwardly upwards from the bottom or ischium of the pelvis she had to roll me on my side for an instance then rolled me back. I did not really enjoy this rock and roll. This took several minutes.

Then she was once again probing my nether regions. “I am looking for the great trochanter bone,” said Kristi.

“Is that what that bone is called.” I was not convinced. The titter amongst her compatriots set the air.

I covered myself with my left hand, had a coughing fit and sat up. “The floor is very cold.” Besides, my manometer was beginning to register an elevated blood pressure. Kristi had pressed a bit too hard.

It was Ingrid who said “you can stand now.”

I lifted myself off the ground, then covered my burgeoning masculinity with both hands. What next I thought.

It was Lauren who approached me and whispered. “Stop being so modest,” she admonished me.

“Look who’s talking.” I whispered back, pointing to her robe with my eyes. It was her turn to smile meekly.

Glynis spoke up, “all we want to do is trace out your skeleton.” I looked at her and said, “I can see that.”

“You don’t mind then,” Karen asked.

“Mind what?” I was getting suspicious that the obvious was going to be done in an obscure fashion.

“You let me trace out your legs …” I looked at her but didn’t say a word.

Lauren put her hand on my shoulder. Then I understood. I shook my head.

“You don’t mind?” It was Karen again. She was embarrassed and gazing downwards. Obviously they had put her up to this. “It’s just … that they …” She looked at her compatriots and stopped.

Kristi completed the sentence, “we want to trace out your skeleton the same way we just traced you out.”

I looked at Lauren in surprise. “Why not just use her?” I bobbed my head in her direction.

She said it again, but this time almost in a whisper, “stop being so modest.”

It was Glynis who spoke up again – logical Glynis. “I do sculpture. It’s just that we have never had a male model before.”

I looked at her and responded, “so you want me to be a living sculpture then.”

Glynis nodded, then continued. “It will help ...” she paused, “us to better understand human anatomy.” For a split second I sensed that Glynis was just going to say ‘me’, but said ‘us’ instead. Every woman for herself?

Ingrid spoke up once more. “With a female model there are too many layers of fat and tissue to appreciate the underlying musculature and base skeleton.”

Ah, but what fat and what tissue, I thought. I glanced up at the clock. There was about three-quarters of an hour left to the drawing session. The sun was shining down on me and I was warming up now that I was no longer lying on the concrete floor. I was almost warming up to the idea.

“What if I want to learn about the musculature and skeleton ... the direct way?” I asked. “What then?”

As if they were of one mind, they turned and stared at Lauren. She did not say a thing, but scowled at me.

“I am getting cold.” That wasn’t the case anymore, but what did the truth matter at this point. “I want to get dressed.”

“We made some tea when you were in the washroom. Would you want some?” It was Karen who spoke. I looked up at her. Her eyes were pleading me to stay. She smiled and continued. “The tea will warm you up and I will be able to finish my drawing for you.”

That was clever and sneaky on her part – ‘*do this and I will finish my drawing for you.*’ In other words, leave now and no telephone number.

I looked up at Karen. “I take my tea without sugar or cream.”

“We have neither sugar …” It was Kristi who spoke up “ … nor spice here.” with her double-entendre.

As I stood modestly before her Karen brought me a cup of tea and held it for me to take. I smiled and thought what a saucy wench. I then just lifted the cup off the saucer but let her hold the saucer for me. I glanced up at the clock. Forty minutes left.

I took a ceremonial sip and returned the cup to the saucer. It was a tisane of some sort, with ginger and lemon zest. “It’s good. I will have some more later.”

Karen set the tea down onto one of the tall stools. I wasn’t really cold and she knew it.

From behind me I hear Ingrid say “stand over here.” She was guiding me onto the blanket. I trod over to the blanket. “Turn around,” she continued.

I obeyed. I now had my back to them. And they were all behind me.

“Keep your feet on the ground and now lift your arms over your head and stretch.”

I did not know why she wanted me to do this but I did what she commanded. The artists gathered behind me. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Glynis standing at my left and Lauren standing at my right.

“Look, his spine is crooked.” I felt a hand trace out the line from the base of my neck to the middle of my back. Then there was a pair of hands on my hips.

“Lift your right leg a bit.” I recognized the voice. It was Ingrid’s again. “A bit more … there hold it.”

I stood like that for a few seconds than began to sway from side to side. “I will hold you.”

“Now move your right leg forward and back, like you are in the ballet.”

I felt awkward but I did what she asked. I could just barely feel my bones clack on my right pelvis. It was more of a muted thwacking sound than a

sharp clack. I had gotten sort of used to the sound in recent months since I hurt myself.

“Now lift your knee as you move your leg forward.”

I did as she asked. Then the clacking became more of a thwacking sound as it became more pronounced. You could hear the bones thwack as they moved past each other.

It was Kristi who said . . . “can you hear that?” Everyone else went silent. I put down my arms, covered myself with my left hand, and looked back over my right shoulder. Kristi was enthusiastically interested in the motion of my right leg. I moved my right leg up and down again and there was that sound – thwack!

I felt here was a chance to be shrewd and clever with her. “Maybe you would like to put your hands on my hips and feel my bone move?”

“Can I?” For the first time I heard enthusiasm in her voice. Ingrid gave up her place and Kristi stepped in. She put her hands on the top of my pelvis. Her hands were cold. I was not surprised.

I moved my right leg back and forth several times and she tried to sort out where the thwacking came from.

Ingrid looked at me and said “Kristi wants to study medicine.” That new bit of knowledge and Kristi’s earlier indifference towards me left me somewhat perplexed. Kristi set about her task with singular determination. So she became an anatomical detective.

The others stood back and watched her at work. To begin with she thought the thwack came from across the entire pelvis. Then she put her hand on my lower spine and felt the clacking on my mid-spine. She then kneeled and placed her ear on my spine and I moved my leg up and down several times. As she kneeled her long hair tickled my lower back.

Then she stood and with her hand she worked her way down my spine from the mid-span to my coccyx. While she did this she placed her other hand in front of me opposite the hand probing my spine. She traveled down under her hand was just below my navel and then stopped.

“Aha! very interesting. You must have a sore back when you sit for a long time.”

I nodded. “I guess we are organic machines, made of organic materials.”

“Clever,” Lauren remarked. “I wondered why you squirmed so much while sitting in class.”

I smiled at Lauren, “yup … sore back.” As I said this I rubbed my lower back with my free hand for emphasis. Then I looked back at Kristi, “Well doc … what’s the prognosis?”

“Too early to tell.” Kristi was enjoying herself. And, to be perfectly frank, I was enjoying myself as well.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the minutes counting down. Only a half-hour then we’d have to dash. Strangely, as I began to enjoy what it was that we were doing the time seemed to speed up.

“We already know that your right leg is shorter than your left leg …” she continued, “let’s see by how much. Someone get me the yard stick.”

It was Karen who dashed to the shelf and took a yard stick that was hanging there down and brought it to Kristi.

She proceeded to measure my two legs, starting with my right one. The others watched as she did this. The way she did this was clever.

“Lift your right leg and lean a bit into that side.” While she kneeled beside me Kristi pressed hard with her fingers to find the top of my femur bone.

“Now stand up straight.” I stood tall and could feel her finger nails dig into my skin, but pain or no pain, I just endured. She then measured the distance.

“Now the left side ...” She measured my left leg and then said. “yes it’s now official, your right leg is three-quarters of an inch shorter than your left leg.”

“Anything else we can measure?” It was Glynis with her wicked sense of humour. I looked at her and gave her my best ‘*don’t you dare even consider it*’ ... look.

“Yes there is!” responded Kristi.

Then quite unexpectedly, and to my great surprise Kristi pressed her finger to find the lowest part of my spine. She used the yardstick to measure the distance between my coccyx and my shoulders.

Then she compared that length to the distance from the top of my pelvis to the top of my right knee. She did the same on the left side as well.

“You have done a number on your right hip haven’t you?”

I nodded.

“How did you do that?”

“It’s a long story,” I looked up at the clock and then said, “and I don’t think we have the time.” Twenty minutes left.

Kristi continued. “And it looks like you have a slight scoliosis in your spine.”

“What? ... in English?”

“You have a twist in your spine.”

“Tell me something I don’t know.”

I could feel Kristi’s hand softly rubbing my lower back. Her hand was now quite warm. “You’re quite tense. I can feel your muscles. Are you in much pain?”

I nodded my head. “Most of the time I am in a great deal of pain.”

“Poor you.” Lauren said sympathetically.

“I have back problems too.” Kristi commiserated. This was completely unexpected. She touched the middle of my back. I stirred. “You hurt your back. I was born with a bad back.”

Kristi unzipped her jumpsuit. Then she turned around and pulled her jump suit down to her hips. She had a scar that ran almost the entire length of her spine. The strap of her bra divided the scar in half. “I was born with scoliosis which was so severe that it could only be corrected by surgery.”

I could tell that this was a revelation to her compatriots. I felt compassion for her and placed my hand on her back. She looked over her shoulder and for the first time showed some warmth and emotion.

“So you too can understand pain,” she looked at me and only me when she said this. She smiled philosophically as she said this. I did and I now also better understood her. This was the first time I saw her smile and, even in a room full of other people, it was a moment of intimacy and confidence between us.

It wasn’t that she was a misanthrope or a misandronist. It wasn’t because she had loved and lost, Kristi was the way she was – serious, distant and taciturn – because she lived in a world of chronic pain, just as I did.

“I have two metal bars in my spine.” She slowly lifted her jumpsuit back over her shoulders and carefully tucked herself in before carefully zipping it up. Then Kristi turned back to face me and her compatriots. She looked up at me, as if to seek some recognition from me.

I looked at her with kind but weary eyes and she knew immediately that I identified with and empathised with her plight. I could see tears in her eyes. Her world must be terribly painful I thought.

“Should we start with my spine?” I turned around, placed my legs perhaps a foot apart and let my hands drop.

As she began to draw my spine I could sense the others were watching her. I was no longer their focus of interest, at least not for the moment. The afternoon had become an emotional rollercoaster.

From time to time I felt the softness of Kristi's hands on my back and stood as straight and proper as I could as she carefully probed and surveyed its structure. Then there was some sketching, then survey and sketching. That went on for a good ten minutes.

My parures were beginning to shine glowingly. I hoped they didn't notice.

Tears began to well in my eyes and slowly trickle down my cheeks. With my back to the others I once again needed to regain my poise. As I stood there, Vitruvian man on the flipside, I didn't mind. I could learn to enjoy this.

Out of the corner of my eye I glanced up at the clock. Ten minutes left.

The tears were not because I was in a great deal of pain at that particular moment – quite the opposite. With the endorphins pulsing though my blood, for the first time in many months I felt no pain – I had the six of them to thank for this.

It was Ingrid who said it was “time to wrap up this session ...” Her words were met with clear disappointment, strangely enough even by me as well.

Lauren walked over and stood beside me. She then quietly said “you can get dressed in the washroom first if you want.” The other artists were trudging back to their easels and had their backs to me.

“You go ahead. I will gather my things and get dressed behind the easel.” I turned. Kristi was busy rolling up the foolscap and looked up at me. I smiled and she smiled back.

I winked at her, then dropped my hands and sauntered tippy toes to my clothes. She smiled, cocked her head aside and winked back.

As she walked back to her easel she stopped besides me. “Thanks ...”

I was behind the easel and was putting on my shirt. “For what?” I still hadn’t put anything on down below, but she wasn’t noticing that.

“I feel a lot better ...” She looked into my eyes. I sensed a new and abiding warmth that she had not shown me before.

“I am glad.” I buttoned the bottom of my shirt and then covered myself with the front of my shirt. “I feel a lot better too.”

“Will you come next week?” Her question was warm-hearted and genuine.

“I might ...” I shrugged my shoulders. “I don’t know.” I didn’t want to make any promises.

Kristi looked anxious. “Can I give you my number just in case you don’t come.”

I nodded.

She looked furtively at the others. “Maybe we can go for coffee sometime just the two of us.”

“Just the two of us ...” That had a nice ring to it. “That would be nice ...”

She looked up to see that no one was watching and since the coast was clear she then pulled a small piece of pink paper from her jumper suit pocket and stuffed it into my hand. Obviously she had written her number out some time before to give me.

“I’ll call you maybe Friday,” I said, “or sometime during the weekend”.

Kristi was beaming as she scurried off.

I had my back to the others while I pulled my underwear and pants on.

Karen appeared next to me. “I waited until you were nearly all dressed,” she said. I smiled at her then looked past her and saw the others gathering their things. The washroom door still close.

She handed me a drawing. I took her drawing and unrolled it. It was a finished drawing of my back, with much more detail than the first one. There in the corner was her telephone number too.

“It’s wonderful,” I said, “and so much better than your first sketch.”

“Thank for letting me touch your body … eh … your spine.”

“Did you really enjoy that?”

She nodded. “I am a very tactile person. I need to touch things to fully understand them.”

“Would you like to fully understand me?”

Her eyes betrayed her cupidity and appetite. “Will you be coming next week?” There was a musical ring to her words.

“Maybe … I don’t know.”

“I am glad I stayed today.” She was blushing as she said this.

“Did you have fun?”

“Lots.” She nodded and had a *bien pensant* expression on her face.

I looked at her and then said “I love your dress.”

She looked down at herself. “Oh! this plain thing. I wear dresses all the time.”

“I would love to see some more of your wardrobe sometime. Will you give me a fashion show?”

“You are different ... most boys want me out of my dress. You want me in them.”

“I would love to draw you sometime. Would you sit for me sometime ... with or without a dress? You decide.”

Her face glowed and her eyes sparkled as she responded. “Maybe ... you have my number.” She reacted as a coquette would to the advance of a handsome man.

She looked up and saw that Glynis was staring at the two of us. “Got to go.” Karen scurried back to her easel and packed her things.

The door to the washroom opened and Lauren reappeared. I looked up at the clock. We would be late for class.

Ingrid handed her an envelope and then Lauren marched over to me. “Ready to go?”

“You’re welcome to dash to class. I need to use the washroom. Too much tea, too much coffee ...”

Before I knew it Lauren was out the door and on her way. She did not even say good bye to her compatriots. Maybe they were used to her dash and panache, but I felt overlooked and taken for granted. When it came to Lauren, I had felt this way for most of the drawing session.

If she had said she would wait for me that would have been nice. But maybe she didn’t want to be seen arriving in class with me just in case it would precipitate a scene with her love sick mathematician.

It was when the door clacked shut behind her that I decided to skip class and took my time walking over to the washroom, spending a few minutes to stop and admire Glynis’ artwork.

Kristi, had her art materials tucked under her arm and was on her way out the door when she stopped to wave back and call “next week then?” Glynis and Karen waved back at Kristi.

Kristi paused at the door looking back into the room. I waited two seconds then waved back. Kristi gave me a separate wave. We had something in common and I felt appreciated by her in a special way. I made a mental note to call her first, then maybe Karen. Kristi and I could talk about our common experiences over coffee sometime.

I turned back to Glynis and her art. She looked at me as I studied her sketches but didn't say a word. I sensed something was out of sorts with her. I turned to her and said that I needed to step into the men's room for a moment and would be back.

She nodded. I continued on my way.

Karen had gathered her things and was all ready to go as I walked past her.
“It was nice meeting you,” I said.

She looked up at me and said in a whisper “Yes … I will sit for you … “you decide.”

“I will phone you,” I whispered back.

“Talk to you soon.” And then she too was on her way.

This afternoon had unexpectedly turned into a wonderful windfall of new acquaintances and exciting possibilities for me. My earlier exuberance had given the women much to think about and had evidently drawn them to action.

I was in and out rather quickly and sauntered back to where Glynis sat. The room seemed different now that it was empty of people. Even the sunlight through the sky light seemed dimmed.

Then Ingrid turned to me. “Thank you for sitting for us. The afternoon went better than I expected. When the model didn’t show I thought we might have to cancel. ”

“You are welcome,” *said back to her, nothing more.*

“The women enjoyed having you model today. They want me to ask you back for next week. They want to finish the tracing.”

“I have never done anything like this before. Can I think about it?”

“Lauren has my number.” Glynis did not seem in much of a hurry to leave. Ingrid sensed this and said to her “lock up when you leave. You know the routine.”

Now Glynis and I were all alone and she had something on her mind.

Chapter Four: The Roman Spearman

There was an awkward silence after Ingrid left. I knew Glynis had something on her mind and she waited a moment before asking a most unexpected request. I dawdled, taking the time to re-tie my shoe laces to give her a chance to ask.

Just as I was giving up the hope she would, and began to make my way to the door, she asked. “Would you like to make twenty dollars?”

“Twenty dollars?” I wondered what she had in mind. I turned to consider her.

She timidly peered up at me and saw that I was looking at her with some intent. “I want to do some more art ...” Her bashfulness was rather out of character, perhaps this private her is the real her and the more public her is not. “... I want to do some more art with you ...”

I felt my face grow warm. “Really?” Perhaps only the two words ‘... do ... you’ registered in my conscience. Maybe my vanity was playing tricks on me. “Um ... what?”

“I will pay you twenty dollars for two hours of your modeling for me.”

“What ... now?” She nodded.

Twenty dollars was a lot of money when I was at university (today it is worth five times as much). I made two decisions then and there. No I wasn't going to math class today – I was rather tired of Lauren's mathematical melodrama – and yes I wanted to earn twenty dollars. She might share it, but Lauren did run off with the modeling fee that was to be shared between the two of us. Here was my chance to make a few dollars.

"What do you have in mind?" I was intrigued.

Glynis looked around the room. "Let's get out of here then." It was clear she had no fondness for the place.

"Oh ... not here?" I pointed to the studio.

She looked at the clock and became a touch more frantic. "No ... I need to be home when my daughter comes home from school. If I am not there she finds an excuse to disappear for the rest of the afternoon."

"And your husband?" I don't know why I asked this. Maybe it was just automatic. Or maybe I was just being careful.

"We are divorced." She answered without any hesitation. There was bitterness in her voice.

"Oh." I said this with a slight sense of relief that she picked up.

“I have my car nearby.” She looked up at me. I sensed she was holding her breath with anxiety.” I looked at the clock to buy a few seconds to draw out the suspense. I found Glynis’ behaviour rather heartening. Just beneath the surface of her staid exterior was an appetite, which I might provoke.

I had never been one to try to understand the human psyche, but today this seemed to be the central theme of the women. Maybe it was the mysteries of the female psyche at play, or maybe it was just artistic angst. I had never formally studied psychology in university – it was always better for me to learn such things ‘clinically’ so to speak. It was time to be clinical.

I was curious to find out what Glynis’ appetite was – whether it was merely artistic or was it physical. Yes, she was a decade older than me, but she did not strike me as a Mrs. Robinson type. After experiencing Lauren’s desire, and sensing the hidden passions of the other artists, I admit I was intrigued to see what Glynis’ appetite could really be. What do the English say – in for a penny, in for a pound.

Besides, today my libido was hot-wired, the melt-down would come later, a few days later when Lauren would try to fit my key to her lock and open Pandora’s box. Without looking up at her, I avowed “I guess I can spare a few hours.”

She drew in a barely audible breadth of relief and avowed in return “let’s go then.” There was a musical ring to those three words that had been missing up until now. Perhaps that music was happiness?

Well then, I thought, I was now delivered into her hands. What she would do with me was now her choice.

She gathered the last of her things and together we made our way back into the noisy and bustling world outside. Glynis turned off the lights and tried to lock the place up as we left. I had to help her with the door, which was stubborn and did not want to close.

The first time the latch did not line up and so we had to open and close the door again. The second time the key did not want to completely enter the lock and so we opened and closed the door a third time, this time with much frustration. Time was a wastin', I could see her thinking. The third time we put our backs into it and then click, the latch took, the key entered the lock and try as we did it would not turn. Murphy was visiting in spades.

She was about to shake the door back and forth, in frustration and try to force the lock. I stopped her with my hand. "Here let me. You are going to break the key."

She stepped aside. I just stared at the lock for a moment. "What are you doing?" she asked in amazement.

"I am trying to visualize what the inside of the lock looks like and then imagine what might be causing the problem."

“And this will work.”

“It’s a machine, isn’t it?”

“Well, yes … I guess so.”

“If we can figure out what’s causing it to malfunction, then maybe we can fix the machine.” I went silent for a moment and closed my eyes. In my mind’s eye I could see the key enter the lock and the barrel of tumblers along the centreline of the lock. It was obviously the last tumbler that was giving us trouble.

I juggled the key down and up and then pushed. The key went flush to the face of the lock. I tried to turn it but it didn’t turn. Then it all made sense. There was a hand hold we had been using to move the door. I realized that we had to take the weight of the door off the lock and so I lifted the door using the handle and then turned the key. It rotated fully to the left and a then a click.

The last bit was always the hardest for a key – the act of lining the key along the centreline and then extracting it. I lifted the door again with the handle and jiggled the key slightly as I withdrew it. It came cleanly out.

The magician had done his trick. “Visualization,” I said as I smiled and handed the key back to Glynis. She had relief written across her face. She

took the key and put it safely in her purse. And then we both turned and hurried along up three stairs and onto the sidewalk.

As we walked away I turned back to look at the building. It now looked very different. It looked the same but it was no longer non-descript. I knew I would never walk by it again without thinking of anything other than heartfelt memories of this afternoon and its artistic adventures.

I also had this sixth sense, sadness perhaps, that I might never enter it again, for fear of being disappointed by a less fulfilling fanfare, or because of the complications I was about to stumble into with Glynis, and Kristi and Karen. Lauren could no longer claim me as merely her own, for these three archangels would exile me from the Garden of Eden and punish Eve.

If I were to get to know each of the archangels on an intimate level, would it be possible for me to ever again meet them all here on equal terms at the same place, at the same time? Most likely not!

The fact that I understood this, even subconsciously, meant I had already made a fundamental decision. There are some journeys in life that allowed you to set the clock back, this was not one of them. Time could only move forward on this journey.

Here I was, having arrived with Lauren, and now leaving with Glynis, with two other telephone numbers burning holes in my subconscious. I was wandering away from this known, journeying towards several other

unknowns, and while this wandering was started at a common centre, the four destinations would turn out to be as distinct as the four points of a compass rose.

It was time to move on. I followed Glynis and we walked quietly towards the throng. The constant stream of people walking past the place had not let up since we arrived. We joined the trek going west to the boulevard where she had parked her car.

I walked beside Glynis for several minutes without saying a thing. She was also silent, looking over at me from time to time. I took the opportunity to study her in greater detail occasionally stepping behind her from time to time as we made our way through the throng of students. As we walked, she was neither rushing nor ambling. She had a self-assured gait to her.

Glynis was attractive, in a subdued sort of a way. She was a good decade older than me, not much more, slim and well dressed. She wore practical clothes, but upscale nonetheless. Her jewellery was genuine, neither ersatz, nor glittery or pretentious. Her hips and backside told me that she looked after herself, probably exercised and did not have such a sweet tooth like Lauren. I smiled. Perhaps she was not as impulsive as Lauren was, nor in a rush for self-gratification. I felt safe.

We arrived at her car. It was a light blue vintage 1960's Volvo station wagon. Most appropriate I thought. She unlocked my door, then stood behind me to one side and put her hand on my shoulder and said "get in."

She did not have to do that, but perhaps she worried I might change my mind and rush off. As I got into the car I brushed against her hip. She had stepped closer to me, as if to block my chance of escape. I got into the passenger seat and buckled in. She closed the door behind me.

On the driver's side Glynis put her bag of art things into the back seat then quickly got in, buckled up and started her car, all in one smooth and well-practised motion. And then we were on our way.

As we pulled out she said, "I am sorry I pinched you."

"That's ok. No one had ever done that to me before."

"It seemed like the thing to do at the time."

"You know Glynis, you might think it really naughty ... but it had actually felt nice at the time." She looked over at me and smiled.

It then struck me what was the game that Lauren had played on me. She wanted to show the others that she was preeminent in matters of love and perhaps even sex.

At this point there was a certain degree of deliciousness in the thought that I am escaping from her and putting Lauren out. It would be another few more minutes before she realized that I would not be coming to math class.

Then she would be left to her own devices. My message to her was quite clear. No more games!

We drove over a bump on the road. That brought me back into the moment. “Nice car.” I thought a bit of polite conversation would open up things between us.

“I’ve had it for years. It’s my parent’s old car.” Glynis did not look over at me but concentrated on her driving. I looked out the window as we drove past the buildings and out of the endowment lands. The campus was on a prominence known as Point Grey. “Is your place far?”

“No, we will be there in a few minutes. My father was a professor.”

“What did he teach?”

“Math …” she responded.

“Really …” I smirked looking at my reflection in the car window. Small world I thought! I continued to look out the window without saying a thing. I sensed that Glynis was studying me out of the corner of her eye as she drove.

Perhaps she thought the same thing I was thinking. There we were, on our way and not having left a trace. If Lauren came back to the artist’s studio it would be shut-up and locked tight. At this moment I felt no obligation

towards Lauren. I had made her afternoon a great success for her and her compatriots, and there wasn't much else she could expect of me at this juncture.

She had also been the cause of my exuberance. What more could Lauren ask of me at this point? She proved her point, at my expense.

We got to an intersection and the light was green, then a few blocks later another green light and then a third. A good omen all around. Then Glynis slowed and signalled to turn left and before I knew it we were driving down a narrow residential street into a back alley and into a car port at the back of a vintage Edwardian house.

“We’re here.” I sort of figured that out and didn’t need to be told. I took my seat belt off opened the door and stepped out of her car. It had been a smooth and rapid ride here. Perhaps another good omen? I locked my door and shut it.

Glynis picked up her things out of the back seat and then closed and locked both her car doors. I followed her through the back gate and to the back stairs of the house. The house was painted a dull green with black trim. The gables were painted black, as was the trim to the door and window frames. The back door was painted a drab grey.

“This was my parent’s house. I inherited it from them when they died.” I looked up to study the house. It was three stories tall, with the top floor

being part attic – part balcony. I guessed her studio would be on the top floor.

I followed Glynis up the back stairs, she unlocked her back door and I followed her into her house and into her kitchen. Everything was immaculate, as if the kitchen was never used. That said something else about her – everything with a place and everything in its place.

“My studio is on the top floor.” Aha, I thought I was right! She set her things down on her kitchen table.

“Would you like some tea?” She asked and then hesitated before asking. “or instant coffee? We don’t normally drink coffee.”

“Tea would be fine.” Instant coffee seemed too impersonal at that moment in time.

I took off my shoes and set them next to the back door. She kicked her shoes off and then set her things down on the kitchen table. “Tea it is then.”

She looked up at the clock. “My daughter should be home any minute. She doesn’t have an afternoon class on Wednesday.”

Glynis took the kettle off the stove and filled it at the tap with water then carefully set the kettle back down on the stove and turned the element on.

“Here … follow me up to my studio.” There was an almost girlish charm to the way she said this. “I have never had a visiting live model before to work off of.” I didn’t catch the significance of ‘visiting’ until a bit later.

Today was definitely a day of many firsts for me.

I followed her out of the kitchen down a short hall, past a living room with immaculate furniture to a stair leading up on the right. I followed her past the front door. The front door had a lovely stain glass window in it. To the left was a very traditional English style living room with a hearth.

We walked up and around then up to the first floor. The steps creaked slightly as we ascended. I watched her hips as we ascended the stairs. Yes, she definitely kept herself in shape. I did not see any lines under the fabric of her pants and so wondered if she merely slipped them over her hips with nothing else underneath.

My goodness, I caught myself thinking. I turned away and peered at the wall. There were paintings on the wall of the stairwell, most were Renaissance paintings by the likes of Sandro Botticelli, Andrea Mantegna and Piero della Francesco. Several of the paintings were figuratives.

We arrived at the first floor landing. She turned back and noticed I was looking at the paintings. I slowed for a brief second, “Nice paintings,” and continued on.

The first floor had two bedrooms with a bathroom midway between the two rooms. Glynis pointed to the back room. “That is mine and the one in the front is my daughter’s.”

We stopped next to the bathroom. The door was closed and so she opened it slightly and turned on the light. “You can change in there if you like. I will give you a robe.”

I looked in. Everything inside the bathroom was bright pink. I smiled and then shut off the light. Glynis continued along the landing to the stairs up to the top floor. Definitely a girl’s world.

I followed Glynis and we continued on to the top floor. There were two rooms on the top floor, one in the back, which was the studio and the front which was a small study and library.

We turned and took a look into the study first. It had bookshelves on all sides and a sturdy oak desk with French doors on the left hand side of the study. The books were mostly math books. “When my parents left me their home, I decided to leave the study the way my father kept it.”

“I turned to her and said, “I recognize many of the math books.”

“You like math?” I nodded.

“Great!” There was a genuine emotion to her answer, “Well … come to think of it … you do take math classes do you!” but she did not dwell on the math, and the study. It was time to move on to the studio.

The studio was the largest room by far on this floor, nearly three times as large as the study. It had a French door on the left side, same as with the study. There was track lighting and a sky light which let some sun in.

The studio had a large easel off to the right side. There was a large mirror against the wall opposite the door. There were shelves and tables holding art supplies. The room was clean and organized, like the rest of the house.

Off to one side of the room were several small round tables on which were several superb white sculptures, of different sizes and in varied states of completion. Two were of nymphs and naiads.

Another sculpture was standing on the floor and was a life-size male figure, in the classical Romanesque style, which Glynis was working on. The figure lacked detail, in particular hands, feet and the pendules. I walked over and began to study this sculpture from and back.

Glynis noticed what I was doing. “You understand now why I wanted you to come and model.” I stood next to the male sculpture and nodded. The extremities and appendage needed work.

In the distant background we could both hear the kettle whistle. “I guess I should go look after the kettle and make the tea. We’ll begin when I come back up. Look around and make yourself at home.”

I did look around and decided to open the French doors and peek out. Outside there was a balcony that ran the length of the left side of the house, joining the studio with the study. I closed the French door behind me and turned back into the room.

I walked over to the two completed, smaller sculptures. The nymph and naiads were remarkable. They were constructed of plaster of Paris. The detail was remarkable, and I noticed immediately that the two figures had the same face, a sort of younger Glynis.

At this point Glynis returned to her studio and saw me admiring the two female sculptures.

“Do you like them?” She proudly asked me about her artwork.

“They are superb!” I ran my hand across the shoulder of the naiad – the water nymph. The figure was bent forward and brushing her hair back. Her breasts were small yet the way the naiad presented herself reminded me of Lauren when she leant forward in her fruitfulness and uttered her two celebrated words.

“These sculptures belong in museums.”

“Thank you.” She handed me a robe to change into, a pink robe. “That’s quite a complement. I have two buyers for them - collectors.”

“Did they take long to create?”

“Several months. I did them during the winter months. They might eventually be made into bronzes”

I looked back and them and uttered “I notice that the faces on the two sculptures are the same. They remind me of you.”

“Yes … I had the same model …” She let the last part of her sentence trail off. Ah, I thought, a mystery here. I sensed she didn’t want me to ask more.

I heard a telephone rang down stairs. “I better answer that. We’ll start when I return. ”

“I’ll get ready.”

“You can change in the bathroom if you like.”

I said that “I’ll change here,” but she was already gone and probably didn’t hear me. I turned my back to the door and began to take my clothes off.

Pretty soon I was needing the robe. Without turning I heard the door open and someone step into the room. There was silence for a moment and a sudden drawing of breath.

Something was wrong. I looked over my shoulder and realized it was not Glynis but her daughter.

For a split second we both looked at each other. Then I realized that I should perhaps wrap myself in the robe. “Oh, I am sorry.” I reached over and lifted the robe onto my shoulders. As I leaned over to grab the robe I realized that I may have pendulated a bit too much of myself.

“Oh …” she was startled. Glynis’ daughter had carried the tea up to the studio on a tray. The cups giggled and clanked against each other she, and the tray she was carrying, became imbalanced for a moment.

“Oh, I am sorry.” For a moment it appeared she might drop the tray, but she steadied herself. I tied the belt around myself. “I thought you were your mother.”

“She’s on the phone,” she said. There was a slight tremor in her voice. “She asked me to take the tea tray up.”

“I hope I didn’t shock you.” Obviously I had.

She shook her head. “My name is Heather.” She was blushing. She now walked awkwardly into the room and set the tea tray down on the only free round table in the room, the one next to the incomplete male sculpture.

“Hello,” I replied, “my name is Patrick.”.

“I am sorry I barged in like that.” She had her back to me as she set the tray down. “My hands were full. I had to push the door open with my foot.”

She turned to face me and looked up. “I didn’t mean to sneak up on you.” Oh yes she had. I could see it in her eyes. She knew exactly what she was doing. I smiled at her. I imagined her standing at the partly opened door for a moment just to enjoy the view.

Heather was dressed in a simple light blue sweater that accentuated her curves and a simple darker blue skirt but no nylons or tights, just knee length socks. While they both had the same eye colour an emerald green, her mother was blonde and Heather was more of a strawberry blonde..

I closely studied her face … then turned to study the two female sculptures. Heather had the same face as on the two female figurines. Mystery solved! It was unmistakeable – Heather was the model for the nymph and the naiad sculptures.

She smiled. “Do you like them?” She knew what I was thinking.

“I think they are superb. They belong in a museum.” I left out the fact that I had told your mother that.

“They *ARE* wonderful aren’t they?” Heather emphasized the word ARE as she spoke. She leaned forward and touched the bosom of one of the sculptures. She stood up and tugged on her sweater. “But I think my mother was too generous … don’t you think? Maybe in a few years.”

I drew in a quick breath of air. “You … posed … for … them.” I gazed at her and pointed at the sculptures. She was flirting with me! Heather was plucky and feisty, and there was a game to be played here.

“Yes, they ARE of me.” Heather had a pleasant and knowing smile on her face. “Of course I sat for them. “ Her smile was so inviting that I thought I might flirt back.

As she said this I walked over to her and stood beside Heather and the two sculptures. I passed my hand over the nymph’s shoulders. The white plaster was cold and pure . Without looking up I knew she was watching me. I wondered what she was thinking.

Then I traced the outline of one of the breasts on the nymph with my finger, the same breast she had herself caressed a moment before. Then I traced down the hip and the side of the sculpture’s physique until I was touching her knee. I paused and looked down at Heather’s feet. Her socks were soft and pulled up to her knees. I slowly let my gaze climb her body, studying

the folds in her clothes. She too was a statuette, but hidden away under the soft folds of her clothes..

My eyes eventually met hers. “The two sculptures are beautiful.” I wondered if she understood the meaning of my words. I continued, “I thought perhaps your mother just got you to pose for their faces.”

“No. We had more fun than just that.” I put my hand to my chin. I glanced at her and then at the figures. “No … I don’t think she is too generous.”

She laughed and understood. “That’s very nice of you.” I could tell she was enjoying the attention I was giving her. Heather then took a few seconds to look me over head to foot and then at the incomplete male sculpture. “You get to model for her today.” I suspected that I didn’t look that imposing in the pink robe.

Perhaps she read my mind for she reached over and began to swing the ends of the pink belt that lay hanging before me. As her finger brushed the front of my robe, she was manifestly thinking of something else.

Heather swung the belt back and forth once, twice and then a third time. Each time the belt swung I became more and more excited. Then her finger caught on the bow of the belt and she tugged. I let her continue what she was doing and wondered how far her seduction of me might go.

She did not stop but tugged again. The belt nearly fell off me and the robe nearly swung open. It was then, at the last possible second, that I quickly grabbed the robe tight.

Heather giggled. "Soon we shall have that off you ..." and then she turned away from me, flinging her hair about and walked over to the tea tray. Then she turned back to look at me, flinging her hair the other way. "I like what I have seen so far." She was smiling at me warmly from across the room.

Well, I guess she didn't think the pink robe detracted from my charms. I had the belt looped around both my thumbs and the robe held closed with each hand. I hesitated for a moment and she waited in anticipation ... then she looked at the male sculpture and then at me.

I looked at the Romanesque sculpture then at her. I knew that she wanted me to drop the robe then and there. But keeping half of me covered, I opened my robe so that my left side, from my shoulder to my feet was now bare for her to see. She expected more but I shook my head. I merely gathered the robe together and retied the belt.

"You will be perfect," she continued. "Here let me pour you some tea." There was a childish charm to the way she did that. "What would you like in your tea?"

"Just tea, thank you."

“No cream or sugar?” I shook my head and she turned back to the tray and poured my tea. I could see the steam rising from the cup.

I studied her carefully and tried to guess her age. Her face still had that roundness of youth. Her skin was soft and pink. I could not see a single wrinkle. She wore no makeup or lipstick, yet her cheeks were rosy and her lips a healthy red. The way she acted was a mixture of adult and high school mannerisms. “What grade are you in?”

Heather looked up at me, wondering why I asked. “I graduate in a few months. Then off to university. Didn’t my mother tell you that?”

I shook my head. “All she mentioned was that she had a daughter ... nothing more.”

Heather handed me my tea. The cup was fancy British china with a gold rim and matching painted cup and saucer. I took the cup and saucer then took a sip. The tea was plain but admirably hot.

Then she went back to admiring the male sculpture. “I think she wants to work on hands and feet today.” She looked at my hands and feet. She ran her hand down its left flank down to its knee.

I followed her eyes. There wasn’t any definition in the space between the navel and the knees. “And perhaps other things too.” She passed her hands

up between the empty legs of the sculpture. She had a smirk on her face when she did this and said ‘other things.’

Heather walked around the male figure and then looked up at me. “It’s patterned off a famous Roman sculpture.” It was the spearman sculpture I had seen before. She ran her hand down its back and buttocks. “But we needed a model to complete this sculpture.”

We! I looked at her in astonishment. We? It made sense that Heather would be part of the artistry for the nymph and the naiad – she modeled for it. But the Roman sculpture as well?

She slowly walked behind me and before I realized what she was doing she had placed her hands on my buttocks. “Heh! What are you doing?” The tea cup in my hand nearly toppled.

“Sculpture is a very tactile practice.” She was taking full advantage and enjoying the moment.

I smirked at her, but didn’t say anything.

“It’s all in the name of art!” She laughed. Her words were rather meagre.

She looked at me. “What catches your eye?” She emphasised the word ‘*your*.’

I looked over at the nymph and then at her. I walked over to Heather and playfully tugged at the front of her sweater, passing my hand close to the forepart of her feminity. “well … that measure of generosity perhaps?”

She laughed again, this time much louder and then suddenly Glynis reappeared. “I see the two of you have met. “ I suddenly felt self-conscious and wondered whether Glynis had caught the last part of Heather and my repartee.

“How’s the tea – strong enough? Did it steep long enough?” The nonchalant way in which Glynis asked me somehow told me she hadn’t.

“Yes,” I said, “it has steeped long enough.” I looked up at Heather as I said this. There was a hunger in her eyes, mixed with a measure of disappointment now that there were three of us in the room.

Glynis walked over to the tray and poured herself some tea. “Not having any tea Heather?”

“Maybe later. I want to start on some homework that is due tomorrow.” Heather smiled over her shoulder and walked out of the studio drawing the door almost closed but not quite shut. Heather walked so softly that the boards in the hallway did not creak.

Glynis turned to me and smiled. “I hope she wasn’t a bother.”

I shook my head. "No bother. In fact, your daughter is quite charming." Charming! Even I wondered what I meant by that. "Your daughter tells me that you want to work on hands and feet."

"Yes, I need a model to do them right. Do you mind?" Glynis looked at me for a second, probably wondering what I meant by charming and then asked, "shall we get started?"

"Can you tell me what that entails?"

"I want to take casts of your hands and feet."

"Casts?"

"Yes in plaster of Paris. It will take about an hour in total. I will do your feet first."

I was intrigued. "How do you do that?"

"I use some Vaseline to keep the plaster from sticking and I set some nylon string as a dividing line and then cast. When the plaster of Paris is hard enough I draw out the string and the cast divides in half. It is a technique I have perfected."

"Sounds simple enough."

She started by taking a big red plastic bucket and pouring an entire bag of Plaster of Paris into it. Glynis stepped to the door and yelled down the hall. “Heather dear ...”

From down the hall way in the study came a response. “yes mother.”

“Heather can you bring me a bucket of water for the plaster.”

“Yes mother.” I could hear the door of the study open and Heather’s foot steps down the stairs. Glynis turned back to me and walked over to a shelf and took down a jar off the shelf and handed it to me.

I looked at the pink label ‘Vaseline baby petroleum jelly’. “Rub this all over your feet, otherwise the plaster will stick to your skin.”

I opened the jar and the room began to fill with a vaguely familiar smell. It was the scent that filled the baby’s room in our house when my little sister was growing up. She was six years younger than I am and she came into the world when I was going into grade. The mysteries of babyhood included what was in that pink labelled jar.

I sat down and took a bit of the jelly in my hand and began rubbing the Vaseline over the top of my right foot. Just after I started preparing my foot Heather reappeared at the door with another red bucket, this one nearly filled with water that she carried carefully into the room and set down next to the other red bucket.

“Do you want me to mix the Plaster for you?”

Glynis said she would look after it. “Is the scoop and the stir stick downstairs?” Heather nodded and was about to leave to get them when Glynis waved her hand and made known she would go get them.

Heather looked at me and then said, ‘here let me do that.’

“Don’t you have homework to do?”

“That can wait.”

I looked down at the jelly on my hand and responded “I have already started.

“I don’t mind doing it.” If she wanted to do this messy job, I wouldn’t stop her.

“Ok.” I shrugged my shoulders. She kneeled down in front of me and took a handful of the stuff and rubbed it on her hands, then jumped right to the task. I thought I might be ticklish but she lifted my foot and rubbed it vigorously into my skin top, both sides and bottom of my foot.

I was about to set that foot down when she said, “keep it off the floor.” Then she grabbed some more Vaseline and started the other foot drawing my two feet apart and placing herself in between my thighs as she did this. I

leaned back to keep my balance and placed my hands on the two arms of the chair.

Even I could smell the musk of me. She looked up just as she had finished. I don't know why she did this, it was craziness I guess, but she adjusted the front of my robe and caught a glimpse of me before setting my robe down again. I could not move my hands for fear of toppling forward onto her. It was clever how she had caught me off balance.

Then she stood. Her timing was perfect, for just then Glynis returned with scoop and stir stick in hand. Clever girl I thought. "He's ready," she said. A sort of double entendre given my state, and perhaps hers.

Heather looked back at me and then asked, "will you be able to keep your feet off the floor."

"Depends how long it would take to mix the plaster."

Glynis answered "two or three minutes to mix and as many minutes to set the molds." I shook my head.

"Here ... let me help," said Heather and then sat at my feet, turning her back to me. I was surprised but then realized what she wanted to do. She tried to drape my knees over her shoulders. I was sitting too far back in the chair to do this comfortably and so I shifted myself forward and let her place my knees and legs the way she wanted to.

She adjusted her hair so that I did not catch it between me and the chair. In doing so she brushed against my robe and pushed it open ever so slightly so that the best of me was now placed against the base of her skull and the top of her spine. She moved her head back and forth. Her soft hair and her warm skin was tickling me.

“Comfortable?” she asked.

“Yes … and you?” I tried not to seem too preoccupied. Glynis continued with her mixing

“Very.” Heather looked back at me when she said this and then turned her head to face forward. Heather placed her hands on my legs and brushed my ankles against her bosom. The vixen! I looked down at her and thought I best not get too excited. But that was just not possible. Her warm skin was touching me, her soft hair tickling me – I began to stir.

Glynis broke the silence. “I have two shoe boxes which we will cast your feet in. But we need to do the soles of your feet first then when there were harden your feet tops.” I nodded in understanding.

“Mom …” Heather spoke next. “I can sit here and hold his feet up and study at the same time if you can get my textbook.”

Glynis looked at my feet and said to her daughter, "this might work. It will take about twenty minutes to cast the bottom of your feet."

She proceeded to finish the mix then she lined the two shoe boxes with a plastic bag she had split in half and then set down about an inch of plaster in each, let then set for a few minutes then carefully placed them under my feet, using a stack of books to keep the casts the right distance above the floor.

"There we go. Heather are you sure you don't mind?" She shook her head back and forth three or four times moving her shoulders for emphasis. The effect on me was delicious. "Ok, which book do you want me to bring for you to study from?"

"I have an AP biology test on Friday." No, I thought, don't be so obvious.

"I will get it." Glynis left to get her textbook from the study. I tweaked her left earlobe. "You are a scoundrel." Heather did not have time to respond before her mother returned with the textbook.

"May I have some tea now mom?" Glynis poured her some tea and then gave it to her.

"I have to go make a phone call now." She looked up at me. "Will you be ok?"

“Yes … I am in good hands.” I patted the top of Heather’s head as I said this.

“Good.” Then Glynis left to make her telephone call.

There was a moment of silence then Heather spoke.

“You’re dripping. Are you supposed to do that?”

Gulp. She could feel it but I couldn’t. “Well it’s kind of a response to the stimulus you are causing me.”

“Stimulus?” She was playing coy. Heather moved her shoulders ever so much. She knew what she was doing.

“It’s good that you are here. Look at what I have a test on, on Friday.” She emphasized I as she spoke and then opened her biology book to chapter nine.

Gulp. Reproduction … fancy that.

“We studied female reproduction on Monday and today …”

“Let me guess … Friday male reproduction.” She flipped open her textbook at the book mark and produced a cross section of my pendule.

She turned around and had a big smile on her face. “Yes .. male reproduction.”

“And they gave you homework?” I felt trapped again – the butterfly in a glass jar. “Why don’t you just do your homework with your boyfriend?”

“Don’t have a boyfriend.”

“Oh … why not?”

“All the boys want to do is get into my panties.”

“And you, what do you want?”

She turned and lifted the corner of my robe and peered under. She would not have been more than an inch or two away from my pendule. “Yes, you are dripping.”

With her finger she touched the tip of me and drew away some of the fluid. It was sticky. “It’s not urine though … Did I do that?”

She was irrepressible and she had me all to herself. “Yes, you did. I don’t know if we should be letting you do this.”

She peeled back more of my robe and peered at me. “It’s pretty small ...”

“What?”

“... compared to the drawing in the textbook.” She giggled. This caused me to jiggle.

“It’s rather cute.” She poked me with her finger.

I pulled my robe back in place and looked her sternly in the eyes. “Heather, your mother will go ballistic if she caught you doing this.”

She held her finger up and listened. Then she said, “she’s still down stairs talking on the phone.”

“How do you know?”

“I just know. Besides the stairs creak when you step to them. Especially the first few on the ground floor.”

“I noticed that. But I still think you should stop.”

“Oh, I don’t think she would mind.”

“Why do you say that?

“We don’t have secrets from each other.”

“So?”

“She told me what happen today at the drawing session with Lauren.” I felt, once again, that my wings were being pinned back.

“Can you do it on demand?”

I wasn’t going to make it easy for her. “Do what?”

“You know.” She held up her textbook and pointed to a word – the E-word.

I didn’t know what to say and so I just said what she already knew.
“Sometimes it just happens ...”

“And other times?”

“I wouldn’t know.” A look of surprise came over her face. “Don’t you have a girl friend?”

I shook my head. Then we both heard it – the distinct creak of the bottom stairs. We both reacted differently, Heather with disappointment and I with relief.

“Can I ask you something?”

I nodded.

“How did it feel?”

“How do you think it would feel?”

“Well … I know how I feel when …”

I smirked. Really, I thought.

“How did it feel?”

“Marvelous!”

The door opened and Glynis reappeared. “What is marvelous?” she asked.

Glynis had caught the last word of our conversation. I looked up and realized I needed to improvise. “Heather was just telling me she modeled for those two sculptures.” I pointed to them, “and she asked me what I thought.”

Glynis looked across the room at the two sculptures and a strange expression came over her face. I had difficulties fathoming what the expression meant. It was neither happiness nor sadness. It was a perplexity.

I wondered about that perplexity. “She that her breasts in the sculptures are rather generous.” Heather gave a nervous laugh.

Glynis glared at her daughter. “Don’t you have your homework to do?”

Heather looked down at the textbook which lay open on her lap. Her mother noticed the subject matter and her face grew stern. Heather decided to test the waters a bit. “He has been helping me with some of the terms. I have been pointing at the bits and pieces in the diagram and he has been making sure I have been pronouncing them right … haven’t you?”

“Yes … of course.” I don’t think I sounded very convincing.

Glynis walked over and looked down into the casting. She touched one with her finger. “It looks dry enough.” She took one of my legs and lifted it out of the casting. The Plaster of Paris held. I looked down and there was the bottom of my boot cast in plaster. The casting was good enough to see the ridges in my skin. She lifted the other foot out of its casting and it held as well. Heather took my legs off her shoulders and set my feet down spread eagle. Glynis turned her back for a moment.

Heather quickly turned and lifted my robe. She wasn’t going to give up without a fight. Then Heather stood still up holding on and then dropping my robe at the last possible second so that when her mother turned back to face us, Glynis was no less than the wiser.

“Mom … can I stay? Please, please, pretty please.”

“You need to go do your homework.”

“If you let me stay this will help me with my homework.”

Glynis looked at me. I shrugged my shoulders.

“Come on … let me stay.”

I stood up. “May I go use the washroom.” The two of them looked up at me. “Too much coffee, too much tea … now I need to …you know how the rest goes.”

“Of course.”

“I will let the two of you sort things out.” I got up and walked down to the washroom and watered the plants then I returned to the studio. As I walked by the study I could see Heather sitting at the desk. I stopped and looked in. She had a disappointed look on her face.

When I returned to the studio Glynis was by herself waiting for me. She had mixed another bucket of plaster. She also had a picture book open for me to see. It was of the Roman Spearman.

Without being asked to do so, I understood and undid my robe and placed it across the back of a chair and walked to the centre of the room.

Then Gynis got down to work and explained how she wanted me to stand as she cast the top of my feet. I stood the way she wanted me and let her work.

Glynis was completely enthralled in her work. She lifted one of my feet into its cast, pouring plaster out of the bucket and then she cast the other of foot. I had my hand over myself in modesty. She had her back to the door as she worked. I looked down at her, then around the room.

For a split second I felt a breeze of cold air but didn't think anything of it for a moment until I looked up and saw Heather peering in through the French doors. She smiled. I shook my head. I cocked my head hoping to convince her to go back to the study and her homework.

She frowned and disappeared. Then there was another brief breeze of cold air and I imagined her back at her desk. By then Glynis had finished pouring the two castings and she stood.

“Do you mind if I sketch you as the casts harden?”

“Sure .. go ahead,” I let my hand drop. There was now a bit more of me for her to see.

We need a spear. In the corner of the studio was an old brook. She walked over to it and took it up. She unscrewed the handle from the broom head and handed me a broom handle. I took up the pose.

Glynis stepped behind the easel and began to sketch. We did not say anything.

Then, after perhaps five minutes of intense sketching, the telephone rang again. I could hear Heather scramble down the stairs to answer the telephone. Then her steps up the stairwell and at the end of the hall she said “its for you ...”

“Take a message dear.”

“They said they are returning your call.” Heather sounded insistent.

Glynis set down her pencil and stood. “I have to take this. I am going to a conference to give a talk.” I relaxed my arms as she turned and left the studio. When the door was open I could see Heather at the end of the hall peering in. Glynis walked past Heather then down the stairs.

The door was left swung wide open and I stood there for Heather to see. Even today I don’t know why I did this put I took up the pose of the Roman spearman. Heather walked down the hall and stood in the doorway the studio.

“Very realistic,” she said. I did not say anything nor did I move. She took a step into the room. Still I did nothing. I could see her out of the corner of my eye staring at me with delight. She walked further into the room until

she was standing first beside me to my right and then behind me. Still I did nothing.

I could not see her, but I could hear her breathing behind me. Then she slowly appeared to my left as she circled around me. I kept my glance ahead and at a distance.

Then Heather stood in front of me, admiring her Roman Spearman. Then she did something I had not expected. Without turning around she slowly made her way to the door and backed out of the room until she was once again standing in the doorway.

When we were alone she could have reached out and touch me. She could have grabbed me, but instead she admired her Roman Spearman as an artist admired a fine work of art. I had misjudged her.

She took up her station at the end of the hallway at the top of the stairs at the same spot where she had stood when Glynis had glided past her. The stairs creaked and a moment later Gynis reappeared. She stopped next to Heather and looked up and saw the Roman Spearman.

Glynis spoke loud enough for me to hear, “well Heather, if you really want to do some sketching ...if he doesn’t mind.”

I turned to the two of them and smiled. I was, after all, their Roman Spearman.

Chapter Five: Bathtub Concubine

I woke up that Friday morning quite early with an ominous feeling that something terrible was going to happen. But, to be perfectly honest that feeling seemed some distance from me. It did not seem to be anchored in my providence, but in the destiny of another.

I fought the urge to remain in bed and call that day a sick day. I had an early morning class I needed to attend, and then there was the matter of the math class, which I didn't need or even want to attend. That was another matter. Since I was informally auditing the math class, it was different than taking a class for credit for which I would have to write a final exam. I had done all the assignments in the math class and had done quite well, but I had been assessing my own work, not the professor. The Prof was an affable type, but very strict in his math – he had a sort of Jeckle and Hyde personality.

I tried to roll over and go back asleep, but I could never do that on a weekday only on Sundays, and today was not a Sunday. I looked outside. The sun was rising above the hill tops and the sky was lightening up. This day had broken. There was a slight drizzle outside, another day of Scottish mist. What was strange is that you could barely see any clouds. Even the sky could not decide one way or the other.

With a mere few weeks left before my a final exams, I rolled out of bed at an unusual time of 0545 and reluctantly set myself on the path for whatever lay waiting for me that day. I usual stayed in bed until 0630.

The commute out to the university was anticlimactic. My morning class also passed uneventful. And in the middle of the morning I ventured to see the math prof of the class I was informally auditing and met with him in his office. Professor H. was teaching statistics. He was married, whether happily or nought one could only speculate had two teen age children – a son and a daughter – was approachable and affable to a degree, and almost always absorbed in his mathematics.

He was curious as to why I had not been to the last two classes. “We had covered some interesting math” he said. I explained to him that for the final few weeks of the term I had some catching up to do with some of my other classes and asked him if I could just drop by periodically to pick up class notes from him. He was a meticulous thinker and always arrived with his lecture notes in hand.

Professor H. was most accommodating; with the proviso I keep the notes to myself. He didn’t want them to circulate for this would mean other students ‘would skip’ (his words) He said he would have the notes ready for me by Monday and invited me to come by then. Now that this matter having been settled, I decided to remain on campus to study for a few hours but felt it best to hide myself in the stacks of the main library lest Lauren come searching for me. I did not know her that well but in the back of my mind I somehow knew she would seek me out.

But me seeking refuge in the stacks of the main library would prove to be to no avail. It was about twenty minutes after the nominal end of the

afternoon math class that I sensed the ominous feeling rise in me again. I was sitting at one of the large oak tables in the physical sciences section of the stacks and did not look up from my quantum physics when she approached me from my blind side. Before I knew she was upon me, standing behind me looking down. Lauren had trapped me with her physical presence.

I looked up. She looked down at me, hands on her hips, scowling. I still didn't say anything, wanting her to break the silence. I think she was waiting for me to say something, as if I owed her an explanation or an apology.

Then she broke the silence, like the shatter of a pane of glass. "Where have you been? I have been looking all over for you!"

I smiled and lifting my index finger to my lips and said "shhhh." Then I pointed to the sign that said that students are to study quietly. "We are in the library."

Lauren looked at the sign, and then back at me. "Don't you shush me!" A shiver went down my spine. Well, that about set the temperature – ice cold. It wasn't a pane of glass she had shattered but a sheet of ice.

"So ... no one is listening." Almost on queue a head of another student poked up from behind a carrel partition when I had hissed "shhhh." I bet

she had been listening in. It was then that I thought I might have some fun with Lauren.

“I have been studying for my finals.” I said this loud enough for the woman in the carrel to hear, but not loud enough to distract her. I was hoping she, as an interested third party, was listening in. She looked further up over the divider but her expression was more curiosity than concern.

Lauren hadn’t seen her like I had. She pressed on. “Why haven’t you been coming to math class?” she queried.

I answered truthfully, “I am just auditing the course. I don’t need the credit.” Probability and statistics, as well as the enigmatic probability distribution functions were something I needed to learn to master my quantum physics. For emphasis I pointed down to the Schrödinger equations I was working on. It was a question about the Dirac Delta function potential. I smiled.

Lauren glanced down at my work almost as if she didn’t trust my explanation.

“Look I have found a novel way to solve the equation using integral transforms.” I would later write this technique up and have it published.

Still Lauren wasn’t convinced. Her eyes bore into me.

“I think I can reformulate all of quantum mechanics in terms of transform theory.”

The other women looked over the divider again but this time she had a quizzical expression. Onward I went.

“Why are you avoiding me?” With an icy edge to the question, Lauren continued her interrogation.

“Am I avoiding you?” I tried to warm the conversation up a minute amount. No use playing this drama out too quickly. It is obvious I was avoiding her, but I did not want to admit that, or at least not too readily.

“You skipped math class on Wednesday and today, and you didn’t come to the drawing session on Wednesday.” Her scolding indicated that the missed drawing class was the real annoyance. I meekly smiled and waited for her to continue.

“Did you do a drawing session with Glynis?”

She must have found out from Glynis. I could see Glynis letting that cat out of its bag with a big meow. Glynis probably wanted me all to herself, but in a way entirely different than Lauren. Glynis was a fine artist and had work set before her. In Lauren’s eyes I was just someone on which she wanted to work her art. “Yes.” I nodded for emphasis.

“What! you bastard.” I did not respond to her taunt. My admission took the wind out of her sails, at least for a few minutes. She could have stormed away at that point and leave everything hanging, but I guess she had more on her mind.

Lauren noisily dragged a chair back from the table and plunked herself down opposite me. The carrel with the third party was now over her right shoulder. I could see the women once again curiously looking on. I ignored her and continued.

“Yes, I sat for her and she paid me. She paid me well. You see … you see, I need the money.” I did not even try to be convincing. My words just came out.

“Where did you model for her? It wasn’t at the studio.”

“No it wasn’t.” I stated the obvious, because there was nothing to be gained by lying. There was more to be gained by telling the truth. I had also learned from watching old Perry Mason reruns that you always hide the unknown behind the known, and the more knowns the better. Make the other side work for it.

Obviously last Wednesday after class Lauren had gone back to the studio looking for me when I did not show up for math class. She might even have drifted over to the Bus Stop café but I avoided that eatery for the rest of last

week. I didn't want to be bush wacked by her in public. I could see her throwing a scene.

As I sat there, somewhat dejected by her, Lauren just glared at me. And glared and glared. I finally admitted a small measure of defeat and put down my pencil. I didn't want her to grab my work and muck it up and so I pushed my calculations aside.

I took a gulp or air and smiled. But in all reality I wasn't smiling at Lauren, I was smiling at the women who was listening in attentively from the carrel beyond Lauren.

I leaned back, a second small admission. "No it wasn't here. I sat for her at her home studio. She is working on a sculpture of a Roman Spearman and needed a live model. The sculpture is nearly completed."

"What!", Lauren was getting angrier by each of my admissions.

I pressed on. "But don't worry, we were chaperoned."

There was a flicker of confusion. "What exactly does that mean?"

"Chaperoned?" I drew the word out.

"Yes?" She leaned forward. Her eyes bore into me.

“Obviously Glynis and I were not alone.”

She pushed back from the table an arm’s length. “Who was with you? Karen ... Kristi ...?

I shook my head. “not any of them.”

“Who then?”

I looked Lauren in her eyes and gave her my best ‘do you really want to know’ look. Her eyes, which had a possessive edge to them, answered me back. And so I weighed up my words and then continued. “Another model she has used.”

Lauren would not let up. “And who was that?”

I looked down with a false modesty, then slowly looked up. Two pairs of eyes were watching me as I responded, Lauren and the women watching us from afar. “Her daughter ...”

With those words Lauren exploded out of her chair and once again stood ominously over me. She did not say a word. Her face grew redder and redder.

“But it’s not what you think ... she’s an artist in her own right, and quite good.”

“I am going to the washroom … “ The women in the carrel behind her had just enough time to duck back down into her seat before Lauren turned. “I will be right back. You better be here when I get back!” Then she stormed off.

I watched her walk away and decided to stay. Had we been alone I would not have felt safe, but the person listening in brought a measure of security. I wasn’t sure what Lauren was capable of. If she got violent the other women would be a witness or could go get help. I thought perhaps by the time she returned Lauren would have cooled down a bit. I looked down at my work but I was no longer in the mood to do abstract quantum physics. My mood had shattered like the sheet of ice.

I stood up, stretched and then casually walked over to the women in the carrel. She looked up at me as I approached.

“I hope we aren’t bothering you.”

She shook her head. “At the start you did,” she smiled, “but now your conversation is getting more interesting.” I looked down into the carrel at what she was working on. It was an integral calculus assignment.

“I think it is about to get even more interesting.”

“Should I leave?” She asked honestly.

I shook my head. “What … and miss the fun?”

“Fun …”, she looked over her shoulder and dropped her voice. “Is she your girlfriend?”

“No … just a friend who happens to be a girl.” I stopped to think on the matter for a second then made a decision. “I guess she’s more of an acquaintance than a friend.”

She looked around first then up at me and quietly asked. “Did you really model?”

I pretended I did not hear her question and leaned forward. “Come again?”

She repeated her question and I cautiously replied. “Yes … I did last Wednesday for the first and second time all in one day. Now I am beginning to regret the decision.”

She looked at me surprised. “How did you feel?” Her question had a sincerity to it.

I stood up and massaged my neck. “It was quite an experience.”

In a whisper she asked “Did you feel ashamed?”

I shook my head. “Listen can you do me a favour?”

“Sure,” she looked at me with a tad measure of apprehension.

“If things go sideways,” I motioned in the direction that Lauren left with my thumb, “can you go get help?”

She nodded with an understanding, then shrugged a half shrug. To lighten things up with her I decided to change the subject somewhat and looked down again at her calculus question. “Do you need some help with your math?”

“Math is not my strongest subject.”

I took the pencil from her hand and wrote a trig identity down. “It will be easier to solve your integral using this identity. Use the same limits of integration. Just be careful with the signs.”

Just then Lauren reappeared. She immediately snapped. “What are you doing?”

I looked up at her. “Aren’t you the suspicious one! I am helping her with her math.”

Lauren looked down at the calculus equation I had just written then pushed past me and walked back to the table. Once again she had rubbed me the

wrong way so I just wrote a quick note to the women at the carrel – ‘*if you need a math tutor call me*’, and I wrote down my name and telephone number then walked back to my books and notes.

I took my time walking back to my seat because I wanted her to stew. Lauren was sitting waiting impatiently for me.

“There’s the mixer tonight at the math department ... I want you to come.” She was blunt and to the point. Once again Lauren had no qualms about using me in her chess game with her love sick mathematician. But I would not play her game.

“Oh ... is it today?” I feigned indifference, but in fact I was quite annoyed with her for asking me this trick.

“It starts at 6:00.”

I looked at the clock on the wall. It was 3:30. I looked back at Lauren and declared. “I was planning to leave for home in an hour.”

Lauren’s demeanor suddenly changed. I had not said no. I had not said yes. I had merely been indifferent. My sense was indifference would be my only defence with her.

“Besides ... I was not invited,” I retorted.

Quick on the draw Lauren re-joined, “everyone who is taking math courses are invited.” I shook my head.

She would not give up. “Why did you not come to the drawing class on Wednesday?” The women poked her head out of the carrel.

“I did not feel up to it.” I thought to myself, I really did not want to go and be played with again.

“But all you had to do was just do some drawing.”

“Oh … did the model show up this time?”

“Yes she did.”

“So I didn’t have to model like last week.”

“No … we drew her. A good two hours. You would have enjoyed it.”

“I am still recovering from standing there naked in front of the six of you women artist. You sort of … ,” I paused, “… set me up!”

“No I didn’t …” She hesitated a split second. Her response lacked conviction.

“I think you did.” It was my turn to glare at her. “Was everyone there? Ingrid, Glynis, Kristi, Megan and Karen?

“Yes they were.” She thought a moment before continuing. “They all say hello by the way.”

“They would, wouldn’t they.” I giggled. “I gave them an afternoon they would not soon forget.” I was looking down and doodling as I said this, but I knew the woman in the carrel was looking on.

“They wondered if you would be coming next session.” I looked up at Lauren. She continued. “I said I would track you down and invite you.”

“Well you’ve tracked me down.” I looked at her intently. “Is that the ONLY reason, the drawing and the mixer?” I emphasized the adverb only.

There was a hesitation in her voice before she continued. Perhaps it was the edginess in my last comment ‘is that the ONLY reason ...’. “Well ... I thought we were friends ...”

“I barely know you.” The double entendre was meant to cajole her.

“And after what happened in the drawing session last Wednesday ... “

“That would have happened to any man enticed by a naked woman, believe me.” The eyes of the interloper grew wide and inquisitive. “You were Eve

enticing me, Adam, with not a stitch on you.” A big smile of understanding passed across the face of the woman listening in. “You knew exactly what you were doing!” Indeed she had, but didn’t want to admit it. There was method to her madness, and I knew this.

The women listening seemed to have suddenly understood. Lauren must have sensed her presence for she swiftly turned around and caught her listening in. “Do you mind!” There was a hysterical edge to her retort.

“Leave her be. We are bothering her. You know we should not be talking here in the library.” I was wanting to stay and hoping Lauren would leave me be for the rest of the afternoon. I looked down at my work and then back at her, but no luck!

Lauren would not let me stay. “Let’s get out of here!” She wanted to have it out with me, about what exactly I was still uncertain. “Let’s go for a coffee.”

My head hurt and frankly I could use a coffee. But, I thought, not the attendant conversation. Frankly a glass of cold water would have been better for my headache. But if I said no we would be still here when the whole matter unravelled, and unravel it would like the delicate silk thread sheltering a butterfly in his cocoon.

At this stage I did not trust her to act rationally. If she had a meltdown here and now it would stigmatize me and forever mark me as an indifferent

paramour, whether I deserved the label or nought and I did like coming to the library anonymously.

“Ok, fine, let us go for coffee.” I stood and leaned over the table as I gathered together my things. My head began to throb even more violently as I gathered my things. At least I owed her a few more minutes of my afternoon, but not the evening. I was not keen to go to the mixer and be played.

My back was now quite painful. I lived in chronic pain but this was more than normal. It was the tension that had suddenly gathered as a knot in my neck and shoulders. Damned, it’s going to be a long afternoon, I thought, a dreadfully long afternoon. I looked up at Lauren. What is the expression ... *’it is like I have known you for ever.’*

I left the three quantum books flipped opened on the table – Gottfried, Kaempffer and Merzbacher (second edition). With some luck the three textbooks would still be there waiting for me on Monday. Sometimes the librarians know to leave the books were they lay for us harried, itinerant physics students.

Lauren noticed as I stretched my stiff back and so I played that to my advantage. “I will go for coffee for an hour but afterwards I must be on my way home.” I grabbed my lower back and began to rub it to loosen my muscles. “As you can see, my neck and back are sore and I have lots of

studying.” I felt weary and had no regrets. I didn’t normally study on a Friday night but perhaps this evening would be an exception.

Lauren shrugged in a non-committal fashion. It was her way of acknowledging the fact without passing judgement as to its importance. Then we were on our way. Lauren marched past the carrel and gave the women a wrathful look. “You shouldn’t eavesdrop on others.” The kettle calling the pot black I thought.

I walked slowly by and shrugged my shoulders. As I looked down the women, she was drawing an arrow at my telephone number in appreciation. She would call me on Saturday afternoon and I ended up tutoring her several times during the run up to her calculus finals. Afterwards for the rest of the summer we took to meeting occasionally to check out art gallery exhibits and the like. It was a platonic and uncomplicated thing. She graduated the following December and we sort of lost track of each other thereafter. But that’s getting ahead of myself.

I followed Lauren out of the library at a discrete distance mind you and in a discrete fashion. First out of the stacks, then through the card box lobby, then down two flights of stairs and out the front doors. I fought the urge to dash down to the right and hide in the men’s room. If I did that she would be at me like a bloodhound.

She did not seem to mind the discrete distance, which I found odd. Maybe it was because she had a good number of dalliances scattered around campus and she didn't want to alert them to her take on me.

I didn't mind the discrete distance, for it was merely her take, mind you, not mine. I didn't ask her where we were going because I had already sensed she was taking us to some secret hideaway where we could talk in peace.

She lead the way west two blocks, past the math building and the Bus Stop café to the parking lot just behind the café and a large white Cadillac convertible. As she got into the driver's side I hesitated looking at the battleship of a car. "It's my mother's. She's away on a family visit to Vienna. She lets me use it when she's away." It was quite a statement – a bourgeois expression, more than anything else. Too major of a car for too minor of a driver.

I looked in and saw the seat belts were readily accessible. They were all lined up, front and back. The car was meticulously shiny, cleaned and maintained. That calmed my fear sufficiently for me to get into the car. The thought of Lauren driving might be bad enough, for my sixth sense told me she would be a rather intense driver, but driving such a large and ponderous vehicle weighed on me almost as much as the automobile itself.

I threw my stuff onto the back seat. "Careful," she huffed. "My mother would kill me if I scratched her car."

I stood for a few seconds wondering if I should just grab my things and be off. Lauren had already gotten into the car and was about to start the monster. We weren't in the library anymore and so I was freer to make my escape. Yet something intrigued me about the strangeness of this situation to lure me to get into the car. It wasn't the reality of her, it was the growing surrealism of her.

I unlocked my door and swung it open, then got in. The solid door weighed a good ton, like the rest of the car, and took an effort on my part to swing it shut. I closed it carefully then put on my seat belt. I turned to her ..."so where are we off to for coffee?"

Without looking at me she started the car before answering. "My place for coffee and strudel."

"Why don't we just grab a coffee at the Bus stop?" I pointed to the café as I asked. "Then you can cross the road and go directly to the mixer afterwards." She shook her head and I wondered if she was going to chicken out of the mixer, if she had to go by herself? Then she turned around to look the other way for traffic. So much for going to some public coffee shop. What was her madness, I thought?

Lauren put the car into reverse and then carefully backed the battleship out of the rather constrained space of the parking lot. She hesitated only once when backing out. It was for a car that originally looked like it was going to drive past but when we started to move the driver of that car coveted our

spot and was waiting for us to leave. Of all people driving the car it was Professor H. Lauren was too busy driving to notice this.

During the drive Lauren asked me three more times to come with her to the mixer, and I kept on saying the same thing. I can't. Every time she changed her tack, I changed mine and we were at an unresolved stalemate. I asked at one point "why even go?" But she ignored that question by feigning some driving distraction.

We were almost to Granville when she turned onto a side street on 41st and half way up a block and then pulled into the curb with gusto. There were no cars parked on that side of the street. Everyone was evidently hard at work but us two. We had arrived at a split level duplex. It was clear which of the two abodes was hers by the subtle Austrian features that ordered the outside of one side of the duplex. She bound out and around the front of the car.

I got out. Carefully I closed the door behind me, gathered my stuff out of the back seat and followed her up the walk. She did not look back as we walked to the front door.

The front door had an ornate gothic grill that could be opened from the inside which allowed a secured look out. I smiled, really now. The door was oak and stained in a rich natural colour. The lock was Teutonic. It all seemed to fit together in all-encompassing theme – *Ostreich Herein!*

I followed Lauren through the front door which she quickly closed behind us, but only after looking out to see if anyone had watched us arrive. I found this odd, but in her suspicious mannerism. I looked around at the entrance. It was austere and functional. At least, I thought, we were entering through Lauren's front door, and not the back door as in my recent visit to Glynis's studio.

When the door was closed behind me the first thing I noticed was the smell – it was a mixture of cooked cabbage and perfume, and the cabbage was dominant. Lauren pointed down at my shoes as she said “shoes.” She took off her shoes carefully balancing against me as she did this . She had presumed I wouldn't mind her touching me as she balanced herself. I did mind and let her know this by not lending her a hand to steady herself as she did this.

Once again she was wearing a very European dress, with expensive Italian shoes. I know we are not supposed to judge a book by its covering, but are we to judge a woman by her clothing. Her purse was Guicci for sure, not an imitation. The pearls real – necklace and earrings. As she balanced to undo her shoes she deliberately showed her cleavage. But it was at that instance uninteresting. She was imposing herself on me and I did not enjoy that.

I waited until she had removed her shoes before I took mine off. She half expected me to steady myself against her but I kept to myself. Instead of just pushing the shoes off my feet I kneeled down and undid the laces one by

one so that later I could be afforded an expeditious get away, and then stood before using one toe to push off the other shoe, one side then the other.

It was a longimanous and deliberate act meant to annoy her. I wanted to gauge her anxiousness and angst. Her expression told me that my tactic worked.

“Do you always take your shoes off this way?”

I smiled at her and nodded. My act was working. Patience was not her forte. She was one for instant gratification. She stood between me and the rest of her house. I looked beyond her into the house. “Nice place you have here.”

With a sour expression on her face she invited me in. “Come in.” She led the way in and I followed her. Off to the left, the entrance had a small washroom with blue-grey tiling. To the right the big parlour had a baby grand, a grand fireplace and a giant crystal chandelier, as well as several turn of the last century beige and light blue furnishings. She wanted to usher me into the parlour and sit me down, but I wanted to see more of the house.

“Let me help you with the coffee ...” I volunteered.

She took the hint and walked me past the dining room, again turn of the last century with a large oak sideboard, and into the kitchen that had modern, high end stainless steel kitchen equipment. The kitchen was more than just

what two women would need merely for themselves. Obviously the kitchen was meant for entertaining, as was the dining room and the parlour.

“Quite a house you have here. You must throw some rather nice parties.”

As she filled the kettle and placed it on the stove Lauren’s face brightened up. “Yes, my mother likes her parties.”

“And you?” She shook her head and turned back towards the Bodum coffee maker that she was filling with new ground coffee she was just grounding using a hand grinder. I shrugged. I guess unlike daughter, like mother. “But you do enjoy the parties your mother throws?”

She turned back to face me. “Some of them, especially Christmas and New Years.” She walked over to the refrigerator and took out a tray of apple strudel with white sugar icing. Aha, she was expecting me, I thought. She had planned this rendezvous.

“Yes I imagine you would... and you are asked to play the piano?”

She nodded. I somehow knew, she being of Austrian heritage, that she would like classical music. “Would you like to hear me play something on the baby grand? Before I could answer, she walked past me carrying the plate of strudel into the dining room and then into the parlour. I followed her dawdling to admire the old furniture. On the side board was arranged several rows of crystal glasses of different sizes and function. By the time I

had arrived in the parlour Lauren had already set the plate of apple strudel down on the coffee table and had sat herself down at the piano and launched into a Chopin nocturne. She was playing from memory for there was no sheet music set in front of her.

As she played I walked around the parlour admiring the paintings and lithographs. Out of the corner of my eye I could see she was looking at me as I surveyed the room. I stopped in front of one of the paintings, which was a reproduction of Adam and Eve by the Italian Antonio Molinari painted in 1704. I turned to Lauren as I stood before the painting and she immediately turned back to her playing.

Then it struck me. There was an underlying theme to her actions towards me, right down to the drawing session from last week. She was obviously not the vestal Eve, but in her mind's eye she was virginal and chaste in her tempestuousness. She had an appetite and was compelled to feed it. It was one of her compulsions.

I turned back to the painting. Eve was at Adam's feet pointing to an apple that was unseen and behind him. The serpent was looking on from the right. Eve was draped over his left thigh, her breast against his leg. Here was compulsion! She was enticing him and he was trying not to be enticed. Adam was looking off into the distance trying to reason with her. She was not listening.

I glanced back to her as I continued my walk around the room. She was not paying attention to me, but trying to entice me with the nocturne. Lauren had told me she had grown up without a father. This would have left a large lack of masculine empathy in her psyche – in her Viennese Id.

Just as I thought this I happened before a book shelf of mostly German books. There before me was a whole row of books by Sigmund Freud with German titles about Psychoanalysis which I could not understand because I could not speak German. The next row down of books were art books. I recognized some of the art books by their covers. I pulled one of the familiar books off the shelf, a book about the *Divine Proportion* and then flipped it open to the page with the Roman Spearman. In fact it was a bronze statue of Zeus.

I turned to face her as she played the last bars of the nocturne. She had an envy, and that envy was now obvious to me. Was it obvious to her I thought? It would be obvious to Sigmund Freud. She also had a number of neuroses, but these were more complicated. I wondered if I would have to leave the neuroses to psychoanalysis.

“Here’s the Roman Spearman.” I tilted the open book to show her the picture from across the room. She ignored me. I put the book back on the shelf and turned to face her. She had stood up from the baby grand and was watching me awkwardly. Who would make the first move?

Then the kettle began to whistle and, obviously relieved, Lauren bounded back into the kitchen leaving me alone in the parlour. I did a complete survey of the room from its centre. The piano and fireplace were special. I looked up ... but the Chandelier was even more-so.

I was curious and so I walked over to the wall switch and without asking for permission I flicked on the Chandelier. The room now sparkled with a bright blue effervescence. It was remarkable beyond words. As I write these words the remarkableness of the moment returns.

I had heard her returning and didn't want to share the moment of discovery with her, but I was too late. Just as I was about to flick off the chandelier Lauren returned with the coffee tray.

I didn't need to ask for she answered ... "it's seventeenth century. It comes from a castle north east of Vienna. It was removed from the castle to keep it out of the hands of the Red Army in 1945." I looked at the chandelier again then turned it off. It was plunder was it. I am not surprised. The room returned to its previous dull white-blue ambivalence.

I could have asked but I decided not to. I didn't want to get drawn into a conversation of geopolitics. She was part Austrian, for god sakes, and so such a conversation would be complicated. Lauren placed the tray down on the coffee table and sat down. She motioned for me to join her on the couch.

I sat but at a discrete distance. She offered me a strudel on a fine china plate, complete with silver fork. She next poured and offered me my coffee, black, no spoon. Before I was comfortable she snatched at me.

“So why is it you don’t want to come to the math mixer?” She would not let the matter drop. She quickly served herself.

I took a taste of the strudel and a sip of coffee then set the strudel down on the table next to my coffee.

Without looking at her I asked “Can’t you let the matter drop?” When she asked me, once again, once again the muscles on my neck and shoulders tightened. My headache immediately got worst. “All this talk about the mixer is giving me a headache.”

I took another sip of the coffee. Suddenly it tasted quite bitter. I was surprised and set the coffee down and then took up the strudel again nibbling away at the sweeter icing portions. Lauren was studying me intently. I did not look at her but concentrated on the strudel I was enjoying.

For the first time I could hear the action of the cuckoo clock on the wall across the room. As I looked up at it the cuckoo peeked out and whistled. It was now five o’clock. I set the strudel down on the table.

Lauren looked at me for a few seconds, probably sensing I wanted to go, then she asked. “Would you like to see the rest of the house?” There was a

softness in her voice. Perhaps she had seen me react to the coffee when I grabbed the strudel. My headache was so bad that I needed the sweet not the bitter.

She set down her strudel, now nearly finished, and stood up. I followed her and we walked out of the parlour and up the stairs. The bannister on the stairs was carved oak, and not very modern. “Is this from Austria too?”

“Yes, 18th century.” I followed her up the stairs. This elegance was beginning to get under my skin. As I followed Lauren up the stairs I thought back to Glynis and wondered what she was doing at this particular instance, and imagined her hard at work in her studio on the Roman spearman. There was a simplicity in her artistic life that was direct and honest.

At the top of the landing, at the top floor to the duplex there were three rooms and one bathroom. The front room was her mother’s, and out of bounds to visitors, so Lauren declared with solemnity. I imagined she only being asked in on special occasions. Next there was also an unadorned study.

The back room was Lauren’s, functional, prim and proper, yet austere with a four post bed in full regalia, and a dressing table, and full length mirror. There was a bit of colour in a large print of Klimt’s painting the Kiss. She wanted me to enter but I did not feel safe and so I did not. I stood at the door for a moment to look in and then turned back into the hallway. When a

woman invites you into her bedroom and you decline that is a rather direct message. No thank you – I am very catholic.

Then there was the bathroom. The bathroom was exquisite. It was well furnished and the piece de resistance was a stand-alone bathtub that was 19th century with claw feet and silver faucets. The bathtub took my breath away.

As I stood admiring it Lauren suddenly and unexpectedly asked “would you like to try it out?” I turned to her to try to gauge whether she was serious. She had read my mind. “You’re not the first to want to try this bathtub. Many people who visit us ask. Sometime we let them sometimes we don’t”

She leaned over and set the plug in place and turned on the water. “Hot, medium or cool.” I thought for a moment and then decided, well why not. My back was sore and I had to make my way home across town on the bus. I could use a hot, quick one.

“Thank you. Medium would be fine to begin with.” I leaned over and tested the water. It was lusciously warm. I wasn’t going to be modest because we were beyond modesty here.

“I will get some towels.” Lauren left me to my own to take off my things and get in. When she returned her intentions were obvious to me. She was only wearing a robe and she was carrying two large light blue towels.

Ah, now I understood ‘I will get some towels.’ She expected to hop in and join me as part of the deal. “I thought you might want company,” she said. If I had known she was expecting to join me I would have passed on trying the bath. Perhaps I was naïve ... because I should have seen this coming.

There wasn’t much I could do. I was already in the bath tub and it was her house and she sets the rules, and well she had been clever and had set the rate of water such that went she came back there would be enough free volume for her to step in without over-flowing the tub.

And that is exactly what she did. She unwrapped herself from her robe and sprung out and then unceremoniously stepped in, with her backside to me. Lauren made herself comfortable without pressing too readily against me. My legs were entangled around the outside of her hips and lower body. The bathtub was so large there was room for two with some space left over.

As I looked over her right shoulder her form seemed to float ethereally and the cavern between her two legs took a life of its own, curved as a convex lens drawing me visually. The angle was most intriguing.

Now settled in, Lauren was pleased with herself and splashed some water on breasts. I said nothing for fear of provoking her to some brash act, a silence which perhaps disappointed her. A minute passed then she asked me quite unexpectedly “do you mind if I add some bath salts?”

That was a pretty neutral thing to ask and so I answered her. “I have never had a bath with bath salts.”

I could tell my ambivalence was not well received by her. Lauren took a handful of pink balls the size of large marbles out of a dish on a small wooden table next to the bath and threw them in. The pink balls began to effervesce, filling the water with rose oil. The perfume was the same perfume I had sensed on her when we were modeling as Adam and Eve beside each other in the studio.

“Oh well, then this will be a real treat.” She emphasized the word REAL. “I bet you have never shared a bath with a woman before either.

I felt a bit cocky and so asked, “when you let others try your bathtub do they get such royal treatment?”

Lauren replied “... of course not!” She leaned forward, opening the distance between us. “What do you think I am ... a bathtub concubine.”

I splashed her with some water. She looked back over her shoulder. “I thank you for the royal treatment.” I rubbed the lower part of Lauren’s back as I said this, in sort of a gesture of kindness more than anything else. This was not meant to arouse her, only to appease.

“What’s wrong with you?” She did not look at me as she asked this.

“What do you mean?” I replied as neutral as I could because I did not feel like I wanted to engage her in any substantive way.

“I am throwing myself at you, and you are throwing me back.” Lauren was still sitting forward as she said this. “Don’t you like me?”

“It’s not a question of liking.” How do you answer a question like this sitting in a bath with the woman who is asking such a question? “I hadn’t expected to take a bath here, nor to have company in the bath any more than I expected to model for art class last week, and to model with you last week. Everything is happening too fast and out of my say.”

“Other men would envy you.”

I stopped rubbing her back and asked the obvious question. “Why are you throwing yourself at me?” She left my question unanswered.

“Why do you want me to go with you to the math mixer tonight?” Again she did not answer my question. She started to move as if she was going to get out of the bathtub.

“Don’t go.” She stopped moving. “Lean back.” She obeyed but didn’t say a thing. When she had settled back I took a handful of water and dripped it across her breasts. She did not flinch. I could not see her face but could see that her earlobes were bright red. I sensed anger in her.

“Are you angry at me?”

“Yes ...”

“Why? ... because I won’t come to the mixer?” Again silence. It must be something bigger. We sat for a minute or two.

I decided perhaps to change the conversation for a few minutes. “I noticed all the Freud books on the shelf in your parlour.”

“They are my mother’s books.” There was a slight dipping of her chin as she said mother. Interesting I thought. There are issues between and her mother. Lauren continued. “She studied at the University in Vienna.”

I pressed on. “I don’t know much about Freud ...do you?”

“I’ve read a few of his books. The ones my mother recommended to me. Freud’s book the Interpretation of Dreams, I found very interesting.”

I drew out what little I had heard about him from memory. But I knew that it would not meet her expectations. Nonetheless I pressed on. “What interests you most about his psychoanalysis? ... his envies .. his neurosis?” With the mention of the word neurosis there was slight twitch in her face. I just caught the edge of the twitch.

There was a hesitation then an answer. It was a truthful one ... “neurosis.”

I waited a moment just in case she would say more, but Lauren remained silent. I guess being asked this question by a man in her own bath tub forced her to be honest with him and with herself.

“Do you talk with anyone about your neurosis?” I was once again venturing into an undiscovered country.”

“Yes I do … I go see a therapist once a week.” I was intrigued because I had heard of such things in movies but never in real life.

“Tell me about your session with your therapist. Is it like in the movies … where you lay back on a couch and all?”

Lauren laughed, and as she did so she giggled, generously sloshing the bath water over the edge of the bathtub and onto the floor. “No I don’t lay back on a couch. We just sit and talk.” We both went silent.

I could hear the water trickle down the drain on the floor. If there is one sound I find annoying it is dripping water, and so for a few minutes as we continued our conversation the background dripping got on my nerves.

From my unique vantage point as she laughed I could appreciate the generous nature of her bosom. The bathwater water tickled the undersides of her breasts and she responded in the most monumental fashion. I took to

dripping more water on her to speed along the progression. With her arousal their shape was changing.

“What do you talk about?”

“It depends on what we want to talk about.”

“We?”

“Sometimes I bring up the topic ... sometimes my therapist does. We have even talked about you.”

“Really ... I bet you will be talking more about me after this afternoon?”

With my hand I poured some water onto her belly button and watched it fill before trickling down towards the hidden finest of her.

She watched as the water trickle down across her. “Yes ... I guess we will.” As I poured more water into her belly button Lauren fidgeted in the bath. “Can we talk about something else?” The water was obviously having its effect. The convex nature of her was becoming more conspicuous.

“Yes ... I guess we can.” But what, I thought, could we talk about?” She did not say anything in response to my question.

Again I felt cocky. “Do you miss not having a dad?” I don’t know why I chose to ask her this but the effect was electric. Lauren bolted up and got out of the bath. Then she stood there glaring down at me.

“Why did you ask that?” Lauren was clearly angry. I think I just pressed her button.

“I was curious.” I just look out at her from the bathtub. There she stood glaring at me, dripping onto the floor.

“Well, if you must know … my father ran off with one of his grad students, leaving my mother and I when I was three.”

Then I looked down at myself. I felt terrible asking that question but I couldn’t admit it. There was a moment of silence.

Then Lauren wrapped herself in her robe without drying herself and then placed her hands on her hips. “I think it is time we both go.”

With that I started to get up out of the bath. She handed me a towel and then turned tail and left me alone to dry myself and get dressed. When I stepped out of the bathroom I knew to make my way directly down the stairs. There she was sitting on the bottom stair waiting for me. In the few minutes that I had taken to dress she had changed into a new dress and was decked out for the mixer.

It didn't matter if she had asked me time and time again, she now definitely wanted to go to the mixer by herself. I didn't argue.

We got into her mother's car and sped off down the street even before I had time to put my seatbelt on and onto Granville where she dropped me off with a jolt at a convenient bus stop. Lauren didn't even say good bye as she made off back to the university. It was a quarter before the hour ...

Yes I had pressed her button. That ominous feeling that I had woken with that morning – well it turned out it wasn't directed at me, as I would find out. I would not see her again until the following Tuesday.

Chapter Six: Like a Matisse Odalisque

There I sat reading my book on the bus when we arrived at the Granville and Broadway intersection. It was my practice to sit about 2/3rds of the way from the front and not too far from the rear exit. I did not look up from my quantum physics book as a large whack of people got off the bus and an even larger whack pushed their way on. Normally I tended to ignore the other people around me, many times sticking my nose in a book instead. But this evening it would be different.

Shortly after the doors closed and the bus left the curb and entered traffic someone pushed their way from near the front to stand next to me. Out of the corner of my eye I noticed a pair of familiar looking women's espadrille which stopped and then turned towards me. I paused for a moment but did not look up. For a split second a portentous feeling passed through my body. Then I saw her hand move and felt a light tap on my shoulder. I slowly closed my book, keeping my finger in the book as a book mark.

Then I let my eyes climbed unhurriedly up the side of the person standing next to me. The outfit was familiar. I remembered seeing it about two weeks prior. Then I smiled and the ominous feeling left me in a blink of an eye.

“Hi!” Her face was lit up with a sparkle in her eyes.

“Hello …” I returned her smile.

She placed her hand on my shoulder. “Am I so glad to see you!” Her face was so soft and inviting.

My face suddenly went very hot. I knew I was blushing. “Hello Kristi.” I was surprised to see her and happy too. After spending part of the afternoon with Lauren, navigating the roadmap of her neurosis, I was glad to meet up with someone I might talk with in a normal sort of way, to clear up my brain of the fog Lauren had left me in.

“What’s you reading?” She looked down at my book. I flipped the book to its cover and she whistled. Several of the people in the bus looked up at her. “Pretty complicated stuff ...”

“How are you?” I looked at her and saw she was carrying a large handbag, heavily laden with books over your left shoulder. She started to take it off her shoulder to set it on the floor.

“I am fine. We missed you last week at the session.” As she said this she looked around the bus with her eyes without moving her head. It was a measure of duplicity on our part that we understood each other without saying more. The bus was crossing the Granville bridge, but neither of us took in the view.

“Would you like to sit?” Before she had a chance to answer my query, I had already stood up and offered her the seat. “I insist ...” I motioned for her to sit with the hand holding the book. For emphasis, I took my thumb out of

the book and closed it shut. There would be no time to read now that we were talking.

Kristi smiled, “you’re a gentleman,” and sat, tucking her bag in at her feet.

I was now standing over her looking down, which was fine for my neck, but the swaying of the bus was not good for the rest of me. “I couldn’t bring myself to come to the session.” I frowned.

Kristi understood. “She put on quite a performance.”

“She did, did she!” We both knew who Kristi was talking about. I looked down into her eyes and sensed her inquisitiveness. We were now across the bridge and making our way through the tangle of traffic of rush hour.

“She made quite a fuss when you didn’t show. It took most of the fun out of the afternoon.”

“After the previous session, I just couldn’t bring myself to come. You understand why?”

Kristi nodded, and smiled in an understanding way but she didn’t respond. I looked up out of the window for a moment. We were just entering the theatre district on Granville. Most appropriate, I thought.

I turned back to her. “How did she find out about Glynis?” When I asked Kristi this an amusing smirk crossed her face. She looked past me. “This is my stop. Come, let’s go for a coffee.”

I nodded and let her spearhead the two of us through to the rear door and out of the bus. She did this masterfully. I stepped off the bus and followed her as she walked to the corner to cross. She looked over at me and said “I have an apartment on the West End.” We were at Robson and Granville. She was leading the two of us down Robson.

The light changed and we started down the road when she started to answer my question. “It was the smile that Glynis had on her face ...”

“Come again?”

“Lauren asked whether anyone had seen you. While the rest of us shrugged her shoulders, Glynis smiled. Lauren pounced on her ruthlessly.”

“What did Glynis say?”

“Only that you had sat for a sculpture she was working on, not much more.”

“Lauren must have gone ballistic!” I said this in a way that conveyed an indifference to how Lauren felt.

“Did she ever! We had to ask her to leave. You know she is a bit crazy.”

“Just a bit.” I rolled my eyes. She laughed.

We were walking by the Vancouver Art Gallery when Kristi stopped and turned to me. “Want to see what’s at the Art Gallery?” Since I hadn’t been there for some time I nodded and we both dashed across the street narrowly avoiding oncoming traffic.

Outside the gallery it was teetering on Friday afternoon chaos. Inside it was an oasis of cool and calm air. I took note of this immediately, for my ears rang with the outside bedlam for a good ten seconds than silence engulfed us both. We checked our bags in and them paid the entrance fee showing our student cards and then walked into the gallery. It being a Friday afternoon the lobby and foyer of the Art Gallery was all but deserted.

There was a visiting exhibit from an East Coast American museum that had an interesting mix of impressionist and post-impressionist sketches and paintings which we walked through half-interested. The exhibit included some Cassatts as well a number of landscapes, portraits and figuratives, nudes of both males and females.

When were both standing in front of one of the female figurative I turned and asked Kristi “how is your contour project coming along?”

“My contour drawing is going along quite well. It’s almost finished.” I was quite surprised to hear this and I think she sensed it, so she continued. “I got

my boyfriend to stand in for you. He rather enjoyed the attention.” But the words sounded hollow, and the spark disappeared from her eyes when she said them.

“I am glad to hear you are finishing what was started in the session.” I could have stopped there but for some reason I felt the urge to continue. “At the time I thought I was just being played as a toy by the rest of you.”

“A boy toy ...,” As she said this she put her hand on my arm. “Perhaps by Lauren, but not by me. I was thrilled to have a male figure. You are a very good model.”

When she put her hand on my arm the effect was electric. My arm tingled from my fingertip to shoulder. I had rarely felt such a flood of endorphins before from a single, simple touch. As she looked at me her irises grew large, as I suspect mine had in a blink of my eye. It was not just the moment, nor the topic of conversation, but the person I was standing beside.

Together we walked over to the next painting, a reclining Modigliani figurative, and she turned to me and asked “do you like Modigliani?”

“I have seen some of his paintings in books, but never in real life.” I turned back to the painting and admired the palette and colour tone. “It is beautiful.”

“He only did figuratives of women you know. This is a painting of his lover Jean.”

I looked back at the Modigliani, and then at Kristi. “Do you blame him?” I replied.

“As a woman … yes and no.”

I was intrigued. “Why yes … and why no.” She turned to me, perhaps to study my face and body language. “You can see his tenderness in this painting for his lover Jean, can’t you?”

“Yes … I can. “

I leaned forward and took a closer look at the painting. There was a slight bump on her belly. I looked back at Kristi. “If you look closely I think you can see she is expecting.”

“Is she!” Kristi looked disbelievingly at the painting, then back at me. “I love the beauty of this painting, but honestly I would enjoy seeing more male figuratives.”

“I guess as a man, I have a different perspective.”

She turned to me and asked. “What draws you into this painting?”

“What are you asking?”

“When you turned to this painting, what did you look at first?”

I was uncertain how to answer this ... “Her breasts ... I guess,” but thought I might play her game

“Really ... not her face.” She had taken her right hand up to her face.

Behind us several people entered the gallery hall. “Well,” I turned to her, “a man can see a woman’s face whenever he wants to, but not the rest of her.” I was holding back and I sensed that Kristi knew this.

She dropped her voice and whispered “But why her breasts?” I looked over at her. She had placed her right hand between her bosom and then when she saw I was looking at her hand she drew it slowly down the front of her until it was at her belt. “and not anywhere else.”

I smiled and glanced down but did not say a thing. Then I turned and pointed at one of the male figurative sketches. “And what about you? What do you look at first in a sketch like that?”

“Definitely not his face.” She giggled.

“I rest my case.”

Kristi did not let things rest at that. “There’s really nothing on a man that interests a woman more than that what makes him a man.”

“Then … perhaps I should have answered … in the spirit of our conversation … that there is nothing on a woman that interest a man more than that what makes her a woman. And there is much more isn’t there to a woman, than a man?”

“Touché.” Kristi was a good sport after all. “But it’s not just that is it?”

I shook my head. “It’s like the story of the hungry donkey …”

“What?”

“You’ve never heard of the story of the hungry donkey?” She shook her head. I smiled and then continued …”it comes from medieval times. Imagine a hungry donkey … standing at the same distance between two bales of hay.”

She looked at me quizzically and waited to hear the rest of the story.

“Well, the poor donkey almost dies of starvation …”

“Why. He has two bales of hay he can eat.”

“Yes but the donkey is indecisive, and he can’t decide whether he should go to the hay at his right or at his left …”

“So men are donkeys.” She giggled again, but this time with more heart.

“Well I wouldn’t put it that way.” It was fun to see her get into the spirit of the story.

“Next you’ll be saying that sex between a man and a women is like two bales of hay for a hungry donkey.” She was looking at me thoughtfully. “It’s a question of top and bottom, isn’t it? I raised my eye brows in mock astonishment, but she did have a point.

Just then the people who were behind us moved closer to admire the Modigliani. It was time for us to move on. Before we continued on to the next painting she placed her hand in mine. It was a wonderfully intimate act is such a public place.

She then led me on to the next exhibit in the next gallery. We did not know what awaited us around the corner. It was a full sized painting of a male figurative. We stood for a moment in front of the next painting, a gaunt and mawkish self-portrait of Egon Schiele in watercolour and pencil. “I can do better than that,” Kristi declared.

“Can you?” I sounded unconvinced.

Then she asked me. “You doing anything this evening?” I shook my head.

“My boyfriend is away, visiting family in Toronto. I have the whole weekend to myself.” She squeezed my hand for encouragement and I felt safe and trusted with her. So I nodded.

The next few paintings were less interesting pieces made by Derain and Braque. We walked through the rest of the ground floor exhibit and returned to the foyer of the exhibit. Kristi turned to me and asked “You don’t want to see more here do you?”

I shook my head. “Let’s go then,” I heard myself saying in an unfamiliar voice. We both left the gallery, collected our things and stepped out the west door back into the noisy world outside.

Before I realized what she was doing she had dashed across the street, barely missing being hit by a speeding yellow cab. From the other side, oblivious to the risk she had taken Kristi waved for me to follow. I shook my head and pointed to the cross walk and started to walk to the corner.

Alright call me chicken, but I was not about to risk my life or limb just to get to the other side of the road. Besides I wouldn’t make half as presentable hood ornament as she would, and she had made it to the other side.

The wait seemed interminable for her and when the light changed instead of merely waiting for me she met me half way across then fell into step besides

me. The throng reminded me how much I hated the big city. We had to push our way through the oncoming rush but we eventually got to the other side and then I ducked with my back to the store window closest to the corner. She tucked in next to me.

“Are you crazy?”

“What?” She was perplexed.

“You nearly got run over by a yellow cab!”

“Taxis don’t hit pedestrians. You get used to it … living in the city. ”

“Get use to what?”

She grabbed my hand and tugged me along, not looking back as she said “the excitement … stupid!” Then we began our mad dash down Robson street. I did not resent being called stupid, for obviously she meant it as a term of endearment.

We swam against the flow. I felt like a fish swimming against the season. Every step forward required me to take a step right or left. The flow was unbearable for me – endless unsmiling faces after their long day at work in some dreary desk job in the business section of Vancouver.

It was grueling but we made the seven block trek down Robson Street towards English Bay, towards the sea. The further we got from Robson and Granville the less was the flow against us into the heart of the city, and more of a flood towards the bay.

I was sweating when we finally stopped for a few seconds and this time she looked both ways before I-walking across (I don't know why it is called j-walking because it is always in a direct line across and nothing else). I followed a few steps behind her. Yes, and again nearly run down by a yellow cab.

Cabbies are a strange breed. Between fares they drive like madmen, and when you are their fare, they drive like Sunday drivers. A sort of *Sociotaxipathy*. This time the taxi driver leaned on his horn. She gave him the finger! So this is excitement.

She looked over at me. "Sorry. That's not the first time he has done that to me."

"Why is that?"

"Oh ... it's a long story." She continued down one of the side streets and through the gates of a twenty story apartment building.

She was traveling at quite a clip. I could hardly keep up with her. With someone with a bum back she was very agile and athletic. She was at the front door of her building opening it with her keys when I caught up to her.

“Where’s the fire?”

“No fire ...”, then in a whisper, “hurry ... I got to pee.” She opened the door and let me step through before stepping through herself. “To the right.”

We got to the elevator and she started to frantically press the up bottom. “This elevator is as ancient as the dinosaurs.” At a distance I could hear a dull creaking of the elevator mechanism. The indicator arm above the door showed the fourth floor, then the third, then the second and then ... it seemed to stand still for a few seconds before it moved to first. And even then it stalled.

I looked over at Kristi and felt for her. The pressing against the bladder, the slowing down of time, the inevitable panic when ... then the door miraculously opened and she dashed in and pressed the twelfth floor button and then close door button. I just had enough time to step in before the door closed behind me.

I turned to her. “We’re going to make it,” I said in the way of encouragement. Past the second floor. The creaking was ominous. She looked at me and nodded, but her nod was not convincing. Then past the

third. It was an inverse count up to twelve. I figure four seconds per floor, she had to hold out for perhaps a minute.

“Give me your stuff.” I took her bag from her. Now past the fourth and fifth. She looked at me with frantic grey-blue eyes. I reached over and tugged at her sweater.

“You’ll need to take this off.” She understood and pulled the sweater over her well coiffured blonde hair. Past the sixth and the seventh. She had three layers between her and her reprieve.

She took her sweater off and handed it to me. Past the eight and the ninth. She started to unbutton the front of her jump suit. She kicked off her shoes and continued.

“No time to be modest,” she said and let the jump suit drop off her shoulders. Kristi stepped out of her jump suit which I collected off the floor along with her shoes. She was wearing all white underneath.

Then past the tenth and eleventh floor. His hands were gathered in front of her. She looked at me and I understood. I closed my eyes and held my hand up in front of me. Something warm and silky was dropped into it just when the clang announced that we had arrived at the twelfth floor. I could feel the doors open and Kristi dash out.

I waited a second before opening my eyes to be feasted by the bareness of her behind as she dashed a few yards down the corridor to her apartment, open the door in one fluid motion and disappear within. The door swung shut behind her, which was fine by me because I did not want to intrude in her privacy. I stood against the wall opposite her apartment door as the elevator door closed and the elevator returned to what I assumed was the ground floor.

Then the door opened and Kristi reappeared. She looked grey and drawn out. She had wrapped herself in a pink robe that only went down to just above her knees. "Come in."

"Is everything fine?" I was concerned for her. She looked unhappy.

She did not answer but turned around holding the door open for me. I stepped into her apartment. She had returned to the washroom and was cleaning the floor. She had been a split second short. I set her things down on the floor of her apartment.

"Here ... let me do that." I nudged her aside. She reluctantly stepped aside.

"I am so ashamed. I guess I drank too much coffee today at school."

"Don't be ashamed ... I know it is a problem for people who have back problems." I knew of such things from my own experience. When I am in

much pain my kidneys work overtime and my bladder has a hard time keeping up. Add medications to the mix and it becomes problematic.

I had nearly finished mopping up when I looked up. I could see the best of her from this angle and she knew it but did not seem to mind. She had a plushness to her. I immediately stood up feeling rather awestruck. She took the towel from me. “Better wash your hands.” Then she disappeared for a moment and I washed my hands, not once, not twice but three times.

She returned empty handed. I looked up at her in the mirror. “Why don’t you take a shower?” I dried my hand on a little towel hanging next to the sink. “I can wait for you downstairs in the lobby.”

“Yes … and no.”

“Come again?”

“Yes, I’ll take a shower …” I turned away to leave her alone in the washroom but she tugged on my arm to keep me where I was, “but you don’t need to wait in the lobby. Stay here with me.”

She tapped the cover seat of the water closet. I nodded and sat. I sensed she was very sad and lonely. I knew that people who suffered through chronic pain suffered their predicament mostly by themselves. It was a private anguish.

She leaned out the door and turned the shower fan on, which rattled for a few seconds then started running in earnest. Then she turned to the shower, drew back the curtain and turned on the water. “Let’s talk while I am in the shower.”

Kristi turned her back to me, undid the belt and let her robe drop and then stepped into the shower, drawing the curtain closed behind her. She was slim and in rather fine shape. I could just make her silhouette out through the translucent shower curtain. As she moved about behind the curtain she was a dynamic and surreal work of art.

Kristi spoke up. “I am so embarrassed. I have reoccurring bladder issues.” There was a pause as she soaped herself. Then she continued. “It’s a mix of the chronic pain and the painkillers and meds they have me on.”

“I understand,” I said in response.

“You’ll have to speak louder. I can barely hear you.”

“I said I understand.”

“That’s better.”

“Bladder issues are common with people with spine and lower back problems. From time to time I have similar issues.”

“Have you.”

“Yes … it’s not just the pain and the medications. It has something to do with irritating the nerves.”

“Yes … It comes and goes. It seems to be worst when I am under stress.”

“Same here …” All this talk about bladders and the water to boot, was pressing against my bladder. “Kristi …”

“Yes …”

“I … umm …” The urge was growing explosive. Hell, I thought, not too in one day.

“Yes …”

“Now I need to pee …”

She looked out from behind the curtain and giggled. “Go for it.” Then she closed the curtain behind her.

I stood up and lifted the seat of the water closet, and well, went for it. I hoped that Kristi could not perceive me from her side of the translucent shower curtain. In a few seconds the urge was gone and I felt much better. But I didn’t flush right off the bat. If I did that the water pressure on the

cold water pipe would drop and the temperature in the shower would go up and well it would scald her. The apartment was so old I doubt the shower had a pressure compensator.

“Oh,” she suddenly said, “wait until I am finished before you flush. Otherwise the water will get too hot and burn me.” I set the seat back down and sat.

“I once did this when my boyfriend was in the shower. He thought I did it on purpose and never forgave me.”

I did not say anything but just sat for a moment in silence. Up until an hour ago I barely knew Kristi, and now I am sitting here sharing her inner most secrets and her an intimate moment in her day. I looked up at her silhouette.

It was she who broke the silence. “Feeling better?” She asked.

“Much. And you.”

“Yes.” Her hand appeared from behind the curtain holding a wet soft light blue cloth. “Scrub my back for me.” Although I barely knew her, this command struck me as typically Kristi – don’t ask just command. “But be gentle.”

I was mindful of the trust she was placing in me. I stood up and took the cloth from her. Her hand reappeared with a lavender coloured and scented

bar of soap. I took that soap as well and rubbed it into the warm and wet cloth. I placed my hand with the soap behind the curtain and she took the bar back and went back to washing herself. Then she drew the curtain aside and there she was standing at the far end of the bath tub, back turned to me, opposite the shower head.

A cloud of steam wafted out from behind the curtain and condensed on my glasses, blinding me for a few seconds. I tilted my head down a bit to look over my glasses. There she was standing in front of me, in a blurr.

The scar that she had partially showed us at the drawing session was now shown to me in its entirety. In the hot water of the shower Kristi's scar was a brighter and more ominous red colour. She had her arms wrapped in front of her and her shoulders were drawn apart.

“Be gentle!” I felt her angst. “I can’t do this myself with a back brush. It’s too rough.” Indeed I was very gentle with her. I started with the top of her spine, but I didn’t scrub but merely dabbed her skin with the cloth. The scar was deep and ragged.

She looked back over her shoulder and smiled. “That feels very good.” Her cheeks on her face were flush and her eyes sparkling. I looked up into her eyes. “Won’t your boyfriend mind if he found us out?” She didn’t say anything but just shook her head slowly from side to side.

So I continued on. She looked down at me and watched me avidly as I gently continued down her back.

When I got to the bottom of her spine I stopped and handed her the cloth. She took the cloth from me. I was about to stand when she placed her left hand on my shoulder encouraging me to stay put.

So I did. As I looked up at her I could admire her as one admired a statue of Aphrodite. I could see the bottom hemisphere of her right breast. It was neither too large nor too small and hung divine and suspended in space. I watched as water dripped from its underside.

Then she put her left hand under her right breast and reached over with her right hand and put the cloth under the shower head. Then she stood up straight and rung the cloth out before handing it back to me.

“I have finished washing your back.”

“Please … don’t stop.” She looked back past her shoulder and down, her eyes guiding me to her backside. I kneeled and rubbed that part of her with the soapy cloth, this time with more vigour. Her musculature was firm and so there was not much of a jiggle to her. As I rubbed she needed to stand more firmly. She placed her hands against the wall of the shower and placed her legs apart.

I rubbed a bit more then asked. “Am I being too rough?” I was worried I might be causing her discomfort.

“No. That feels very good.” Her cheeks were turning red by my rubbing and from the pleasure of the moment. Her backside was now covered in soap bubbles.

I handed her the cloth a second time. She reached for the cloth and put it under the shower head, rung it out and then handed it back to me a second time. While she did this I admired her form. Were it not for the scar on her back everything about her would be perfect.

I continued washing her with the soapy cloth, and when finished washed her backside I went down the back of her right leg then her left leg. When I was finished I stood up and handed the cloth back to her.

“Thank you … that was wonderful.” She smiled lusciously and lovingly.
“Would you like to join me?” My heart jumped.

“Ummmm …” I didn’t know what to say, so I said the first thing that came to mind. “Maybe some other time,” too taken aback to say anything beyond that – sharing such intimacy with two women in one day – what an embarrassment of riches. That would be too much excitement for one day, a bath and a shower! Besides, this time I was sure I could not help myself, and that would not have been good for either of us, boyfriend of no boyfriend.

She smiled neither disappointed nor angry and then closed the curtain and rinsed herself down with water. Maybe she was just being polite, but in an intimate sort of way. She had, after all, already seen the best of me. But art is art, and life is something more than art, n'est ce pas?

I sat back down on the seat of the water closet drying my hands with her towel, then put her towel back on the edge of the sink. From behind the curtain Kristi spoke, barely audible about the sound of the falling water. “Thank you, you are very kind and gentle.”

I waited a moment before responding. “Kristi … you are very pretty, une objet d’art.”

“What does that mean?”

“It’s hard to translate. It means that you are a beautiful work of artistic, a masterpiece.”

She stopped the shower and drew the curtain partly open. There she was partly standing before me, half hidden behind the curtain, her hand grasping her breast. It was perhaps a measure of her hesitancy. “You think so, even with the scar?”

I nodded. She drew the curtain open and began to step out of the shower. I was amazed by her daring. “Don’t just stand there gawking … get me my

towel.” She pointed to the sink where she had set it down. I picked it up and handed it to her. She turned herself around and dried her face then handed the towel back to me and said. “Dry me.”

“You’re very trusting.”

“I have seen you naked, and now you have seen me naked.”

“I am the more fortunate.”

“You think so?” She looked at me and then said, “believe me you’re no donkey.”

I did not say a thing. I softly and carefully dried her back but not by rubbing but once again dabbing her body with the towel, making sure not to burnish her scars. I dried what I had washed of her, her back, her backside and her legs.

“I know you well enough to know you can be trusted. When you were there as our model you bared more than just your body. You bared your soul as well.”

This gave me the courage to say something that had been on my mind since I was mopping up after her little spill. “Can I suggest something?”

“What?” I handed her the towel and she continued with drying herself, keeping her back to me.

“You know, a little less hair down there and you would probably have so much trouble with your bladder.”

Kristi stopped and looked back at me. “How do you know what I have down there?”

“I could not help to notice. Your robe is so short.”

“Oh … The doctor has said that to me as well. But it’s rather hard to trim. You need to get someone else to do it for you.”

“Well … maybe your boyfriend can help you with this?”

She tossed her towel at me. I caught it and wondered why she had done this.

As Kristi wrapped herself in her robe she confessed. “My old boyfriend is gone back to Toronto … for good. We’ve broken up.”

“I am sorry to hear that.” I said that more out of empathy than out of sympathy.

She turned towards me and scowled. “Would you like to know why?”

I shrugged my shoulders out of indifference. I wasn't one for gossip. Kristi mistook that as a sign to continue. Before I could say anything she did.

"It wasn't that we were incompatible."

"It usually isn't." I was one to talk, having had many girls who were friends or at the very least acquaintances, but never having had a steady girl friend at that point in my life. I looked at her with a sympathetic expression on my face.

"He was too active for me." Kristi paused to contemplate whether to continue. "He wanted too much from me. He never understood my limitations."

I think I understood what she meant but was unsure. "Too much?"

"... every night ..."

"Oh!" I could feel my face grow bright red. I looked at her with a surprised expression. She nodded.

"Sex with him was a mechanical thing." It got so bad towards the end that I could hardly walk."

"Your back?"

She nodded and was about to add some words when she stopped herself abruptly.

“How long were you together?”

“About a year.”

“You must have loved him.”

“At the beginning yes ... but not towards the end. Towards the end I realized that he had mistaken lust for love.”

I was now curious and so I asked. “Why did you stay together so long?”

“Why do most couples stay together after the love has gone?”

“I don’t know. Convenience perhaps?” I shrugged my shoulders.

She looked at me and said, “I don’t like being lonely, especially at night. Just the presence of someone next to me helps me sleep. My mom said I should get a cat.”

I looked up at her and it was then that I first noticed her fatigue. She had hidden it well underneath her makeup, but now that it was washed away the real Kristi was to be seen.

“Was he your first ...”

“First?”

“Your first steady boyfriend.”

She shook her head. “No. I had one in high school, but he went off to University. But by then we had also sort of drifted apart.”

I went silent. I did not want to pry any further into her life. But she continued talking, as if having someone to talk to had open a flood of words.

“I was shy when I was growing up ... because of my back.” She was rubbing her back as she said this. “But I was still popular with most of my classmates.”

“I don’t remember mine.”

She looked at me for a moment then decided to continue. “I was fifteen.”

I contorted my face in confusion.

“It was summer camp.”

“What?”

“We were swimming in the lake. He took my hand and put it down the front of his swim suit.”

“Oh ...”

“Then I let him put his hand down mine.”

I looked at her face when she said this. For a moment colour came back to her cheeks. But then as she reminisced she once again looked tired, very tired. She peered up at me, with an expression that begged an answer.

“Summer camp at a lake north of Edmonton.” I thought back to the lovely cook who would take an hour off each afternoon midway between lunch and dinner. “There was a girl, a bit older than me, the camp cook who would go sun herself in a canoe.”

She turned to me and asked, “how much older.”

“It wasn’t what you think. She was in first year university and this was her summer job. . She was very nice. One day I decided I would swim out to her and say hello. I had to trek through the weeds and rushes before swimming out to the canoe because she was drifting so far from the dock.”

“And ...”

“Well I swam out and it took all my strength and effort. When I got to the canoe she was asleep on the floor of the canoe. All you could see were her knees over the gunnels. I had barely enough strength left to reach up and hang on.”

“And ...”

“Well ...I noticed she wasn’t wearing her swim suit. Then she woke up and looked out over the edge of the canoe and saw me. She didn’t get angry though, only very concerned. We were far from the shore and she could see I was exhausted. She just wrapped herself in her towel and then lifted me into the boat.”

“What happened next?”

“It was then she noticed something stuck on my shoulder. When she turned me around she saw that I had leeches attached up and down my body.”

“Ewww ... leeches.”

I put my thumbs in the front of my pants and tugged. “They had even got into my swim suit.”

“Oh.” She had an amused look on her face. “How did you get them off?

“Well, she lit a cigarette and used it to coax the leeches off. I still have a few scars from this.”

“How old was she?”

“Seventeen. Well, she had to remove five leeches … two on my back, two on my legs and one …”

“Where?”

“Guess …”

Kristi squealed with laughter. “No!”

I nodded. Then I continued. “That was awkward.”

“I imagined it was!”

“Well it had to be taken off, and to do that I had to take off … ”

“Your bathing suit!” She squealed with amusement.

I nodded. “I had to sit perfectly still as she held the best of me in her hand and carefully tried to remove the last leech. It was the biggest one by far. She was watching me and I was watching her. I remember the canoe was rocking from side to side.”

Kristi's eyes were sparkling as she listened intently.

"I tried not to get too excited, but we were both sitting in the canoe and we didn't have a stitch of clothing on us, and there was this leech creature sucking my blood."

"Sort of like a bad horror film ..."

I smiled. "What I remember is that I closed my eyes and she was gentle. She tried to peel the leech off of me but it wouldn't let go. I could feel the heat from the tip of her cigarette. I had to hold myself as she tried again. The second time we almost got it off. I was so nervous my hand was shaking, so she held me and the third time the leech finally curled up and fell with a thud to the bottom of the boat ... and well I guess it was the excitement and the relief but then it happened."

"What happened?"

I stopped rather embarrassed. "Ummm ... The same thing that happened the other day when Lauren leaned over and whispered 'Hello Beautiful' in my ear."

"Oh!" Again she squealed with laughter.

“Well, when it was over we both just sat there and giggled. She was catholic like me and well this was our first encounter with the opposite sex.”

“But without the sex ...you should write this encounter up as a story sometime ... not that anyone would believe it. And the girl?”

“Well. For the rest of the week we both went paddling in the canoe every afternoon together around the lake. We both ended up with tans but with no tans lines.”

“And ...” Obviously she was expecting more to the story but I disappointed her.

“That was really all.”

“What ... nothing more. I don’t believe that.” She was incredulous.

“We didn’t have sex if that what’s you’re asking. But it was the summer I grew up.”

“No sex!”

“We were both still innocent, and she said if we had sex that week she would get pregnant ... being the wrong time and all.”

Kristi nodded her understanding.

“One thing I do remember clearly was that the first time I saw her without her bathing suit she had hair down there, and under her arms too, then the next time that was no hair to be seen.”

Kristi didn’t say anything and as I looked up at her, after a few seconds her fatigue returned. “You haven’t been sleeping have you?” She shook her head.

“How long have you gone without sleep?”

“All week. He left last Saturday night.

“What happened?”

“We had gone out with some of his friends on Friday night and he had drunk too much, as usual.”

“Did he get drunk often?” She shook her head, but with a hesitancy that told me that he had a few times before and perhaps they had had problems then.

“On Saturday morning we had a big fight and I went for a walk.” She lifted her hand to her face and I sensed that he might have struck her.”

I stood up and motioned for her to sit. She did. I took the towel and kneeled at her feet and started to dry her feet. Her toe nails were rough and unkept.

That made sense because she probably couldn't bend far enough to paint her toe nails.

I looked up at her. "Was he violent?" She looked up at me but didn't say anything. Her body language told me all I needed to know. He had probably struck her across her face. I noticed a small bruise on her lower right jaw which she had covered with makeup.

Tears started to fill her eyes. "When I came back he had packed most of his things and had gone." She rubbed a tear from her eye. "He left me a note saying he wasn't coming back."

We both went silent. A wave of compassion crashed over me, a large wave, a tsunami and I felt like I was awash in her emotions, and being dragged under by the tow. I decided I should spend some time with Kristi this evening instead of dashing off home. I finished drying her feet, folded the towel and set it on the side of the bath tub.

"Do you have some small scissors?"

Kristi pointed to the medicine cabinet. I stood up and opened the cabinet. The three shelves were filled with countless prescriptions all in little plastic vials. I looked at the labels of some of them. Many of them were painkillers.

On the bottom right hand shelf there were two pairs of scissors, one to trim nails and a second pair a bit bigger for trimming hair. It was then that a thought came to mind and I picked up one pair in my right hand and the other in my left.

I turned to Kristi and presented her with the two options. “Which one?”

She looked at the two scissors then at me, confused.

“Choose.”

“I don’t understand.”

“You need some trimming. . .” I took the hand with the small scissors and moved it close to her feet, and I moved the bigger set of scissors and place my hand in her lap.

It took her a second but then she smiled with understanding and touched my hand in her lap. I put the smaller scissors onto the sink counter and said “for later.”

Without needing to be asked she moved herself to the edge of the water closet. I sat at her feet and looked up at her. She sat with her hands behind her balancing herself. Water dripped off her knees onto the ceramic floor.

I reached up and as she watched my hand slowly tugged at the belt which teased her robe open. She unwrapped from the top down, helped on the way by the fullness of her breasts.

There was a moment of hesitation, but I looked up into her eyes, never taking my eyes off her face. As I watched her face her cheeks began to take on a healthy crimson hue.

“How do you feel?”

“Wonderful ...”

“Do you feel any pain?”

She pursed her lips before answering. “No.” As she did this she spread her legs wider. Her eyes guided mine down.

It was an admirable tangle of soft hair. “I looked up at her and said “you will need to help me ... I have never done this before.” She smiled and whispered “neither have I.”

She placed the fingers of her left hand and closed herself. She leaned forward to watch.

I carefully trimmed around her fingers, letting the soft tuffs of cut hair drop into my hand. From time to time I emptied my hand onto the counter edge.

Our progress measured in the growing mound of soft hair. As I did this I could feel her right hand stroking my hair in a sign of modest intimacy.

“You have a soft touch.” We were so close I could hear her words caress my face.

Without saying anything she knew that it was time to move her fingers, and now she opened herself. I paused and my hand began to shake. It was a remarkable panorama, one I had never really glimpsed before in such intimate terms – the fountain of life. I looked up at her and she could see my nervousness.

She leaned over and whispered “I trust you … but be careful” then leaned back offering me all of herself. I figured it best to start from the top and carefully meander my way down.

“Don’t move”, I said. I was really nervous for the innate and obvious reasons. I was also worried I might snip something sensitive.

Her irises were open to their fullest. “I won’t move an inch.”

I place my little finger over her little chapeau pushed down. She flinched but not from pain. She looked down at me as I trimmed the soft tuff of hair around her little chapeau. As my little finger touched it I could feel the throbbing of her pulse. It was an indescribable feeling for me, and I imagine for her as well.

When I had finished this little trim I lifted my finger suddenly and her little chapeau rebounded twice the size of what it was when I began.

I looked up at her. Kristi had closed her eyes and her face was now a rush of pink and red. I could see she was feeling much better.

I turned back to the last remaining tuffs of hair that I could trim safely. I carefully snipped without pulling. She was moist but I suspected because she had just showered.

Then the thought came to me to tease her a bit. I began to blow air to dry her a bit and to blow away the stray hair.

She opened her eyes but said nothing. I stopped blowing and looked up at her. “Don’t … stop …” The pleading in her eyes helped me to understand she meant to not stop, and not STOP! I smiled and blew a little more forcefully. She gave out a soft sigh … “that’s feels so good.”

I looked up at her and said, “all done.”

She had such a look of disappointment. But we both knew that this was the extent of my help. I stood up and emptied my hand in the sink. She did not move..

“You know … you need to get off all those medications.”

“I know … but I need the pain-killers.”

“Do you do anything pleasurable?”

“Why do you ask?”

“Well, my experiences have taught me that only pleasure can overpower pain.” She did not say anything so I continued. “The other day when I was modeling for the art … my endorphins could completely overpower my pain.”

“Are you saying I should take up modeling?”

I smiled. “All I am saying is that you need to find something pleasurable to help your body to cope with the pain, and wean yourself off the drugs.” As I said this I caressed the outside of her right leg.

“Will you give me a massage?” Well … she was learning quickly. I nodded, and she stood not bothering to take her robe with her,

I watched as she ambled out of the bathroom. Except for the scar on her bath, everything else seemed perfect. I had never seen a nude woman from this angle before. The fluid movements of the muscles on her body was a revelation.

I got up and followed her into her bedroom. Her bed was unmade and there was clothes scattered all over the floor. The scene was unexpected. I had visions of a fully ordered life.

She looked at me almost as if she was reading my mind. “Sorry for the mess. I have gone to pieces since he left ...”

“No need to apologize.”

She struggle with the comforter. I reached past her and pulled it off the bed, folded it and placed it at the foot of the bed. I patted the centre of the bed.
“Lay face down.”

She obliged. I carefully sat on the bed next to her and began to massage her shoulders. Her neck muscles were tense. “I will only caress your muscles not work them. With your back and all, it is best that your physiotherapist does the muscle work. You do have a physiotherapist.”

She smiled. I took that to mean yes.

With the soft back of my hand I caressed her shoulders. As I looked down at her, she was looking up at me.

“Do you have something soft, like a silk scarf

“In the top drawer of the dresser.” I carefully got up off the bed and opened the dresser drawer. It was full of silk things, not all scarfs. I smiled and took up something ochre. It was a camisole. She chuckled. “Try again.”

Next it was something black. Definitely not a scarf, but not a camisole, something more intimate. She shook her head with a smirk. Third time lucky. I tugged and extracted a bright pink scarf.

The I took the scarf and held it so that it just touched her skin and drew it from her head down to the base of her spine.

“Wow …” she was quite amazed. The effect was electric. There were goose bumps all over her body.

“See what I mean.” Unexpectedly she rolled over, so I did the same on the front of her. The effect was twice as potent. I ran the silk up one of her arms, across her face, then down her other arm, reaching across her body as I did this. Then I ran the pink silk down her midriff stopping at the best of her.

Her eyes were closed and her lips partly opened. Her tongue was just poking out.

I leaned over and kissed her on her cheek. She did not open her eyes. But she did smile.

“You look very relaxed.”

“I feel no pain … only pleasure. You are right … the pleasure over powers the pain.”

I did not say anything but continued to draw the pink scarf across her body until the pleasure was too much for her and she began to giggle a little at first then more and more, until I knew I had to stop. When I stopped was when she opened her eyes.

“That was divine.”

I drew the comforter over her and then kissed her forehead. She did not move. She understood.

“You are very kind and thoughtful.” As she said this a pained expression came over her face. I looked at her face transform from one of tranquility to distress. Then she pushed back the covers and bounded out of the bed, out of her bedroom and down the hall to the bathroom.

The sound of sprinkling water said all that needed to be said. I felt sorry for her and hoped that this distress on her kidneys and bladder would soon disappear. It was several minutes before she reappeared.

In her absence I began to gather up the clothes that were scattered about the room and piling them up on a chair. I did not bother folding them for they

needed to be washed. When she returned the floor was clear and the stack nearly teetering off the edge of the chair.

She stood at the doorway almost in a state of exhaustion, holding herself up with her arms and shoulder. “I feel very tired.”

“Perhaps I should leave and let you sleep.”

She shook her head, “stay for a while longer.”

“Perhaps you are dehydrated.” She nodded. “Let me get you something to drink.” I got up off the foot of her bed and walked over and stood next to her in the door way. I could feel her warmth. I turned to look at her and kissed her on her shoulder merely as a sign of empathy. I did not want to encourage more from her in her vulnerable state.

Her face was in the foreground, big, round and very real. Her eyes were tired, yet soft and pure. I could see the gradation of colour in her irises, which surrounded a rich pool of luscious emotion. I could see my reflection in her iris and wondered if she could see hers in mine.

In the background was one breast, also big, real, but not so round from this angle, with the crest of it sloping in that way that only arousal could present. I could see the little dimples circling the nipple, which was flush of blood. I wanted so much to reach over and caress her but held back, again out of empathy. My eyes would caress her this afternoon, and nothing more.

There was an awkward pause. She perhaps sensed my restraint and so leaned over and kissed me on the cheek. When she did this the best of her presented itself, which was also flush with blood. In a few seconds it was apparent that matters would get out of my control.

She was aroused, and so was I. She was vulnerable and inviting. I was merely vulnerable. The best of me was also aroused and it was getting harder and harder for me to hide that fact. She probably already knew this.

I did not want to encourage her, but at the same moment, I did not want to dissuade her. I wanted her to feel this pleasure and appreciation for as long as she could, without compromising either of us. Besides she obviously had a bladder infection, which I did not want to pick up.

Her hand brushed against my leg. I looked down at her arm and then at her hip and leg, clear down to her feet. Then a thought came over me.

“Let me make you something to drink.” The pleasing smile said it all. I looked at her quizzically.

“Oh … I never wear anything when I am home alone.”

“But you are not alone …”

“I trust you … and besides … you have seen all of me already.”

Before I could say anything she had turned and was walking to her kitchen. I admired her form as she took the three steps and then turned to the left. There is something about the shape of a woman's hips and the richness of their posterior that is uniquely female, and a measure of their fecundity.

I heard the kitchen tap and then a kettle being filled. By the time I arrived at her kitchen she had already set the kettle onto the electric stove and was grabbing for some coffee.

I walked two more steps and literally grabbed the coffee from her. "No ... no more coffee." She looked back at me without argument.

I put the coffee back on the shelf and looked to see what else she had in the way of tea. There was the usual Pekoe, and Red Rose blends, and tucked into a corner was an unopened box of peppermint tea. I took the box off the shelf and as she watched me I un-wrapped the box, opened it and took a tea bag of peppermint tea out.

It's better for you to have plain tea. The French call them tissanes." I don't know why I threw that fact in. Maybe because it sounded so prescriptive. "Do you have a tea pot?" She shook her head, and produced a large mug instead. Then she turned around and leaned against the counter watching me watch the kettle heat to a boil. Her two arms were bent at the elbows. Her left leg was bent as well and she swung that leg open and closed, in a

provocative fashion. As she swayed back and forth almost imperceptively her breasts kept time with the rest of her.

“You need to stay off coffee … at least for a few weeks to give your kidneys and bladder a rest. And anything else that will irritate your body.” She started to sway forward and back as well in a sort of dance. Her breathing was becoming more noticeable as well.

I wondered what was happening, then it became obvious to me. The motion of her legs was like pumping up a balloon, but it was not a balloon that was being compelled, it was the best of her which was being caressed with every swaying of her legs. A noise gurgled up from the kettle as it started to heat.

There is so much about woman to be envious about, not the least of which is the clever ways they can bring themselves, self-pleasure. The kettle had started to murmur. I let her whole drama play itself out. She started to glow with a crimson and pinkness.

With my fingers I began caress the top of her hip, as the kettle burbled. Her swaying increased in both intensity and speed. I looked up at her and she had closed her eyes. The kettle had begun to boil and so I turned to take it off the element and to turn the element off. She I turned back to face Kristi the whole of her was shuddering an almost imperceptible shudder. She had come to her boil as well

I stood quietly and admired her. She looked so pure and so innocent. I had never seen such beauty in any woman before.

“You look so beautiful.”

She opened her eyes, dropped her chin a bit and smiled at me. I guess she felt self-conscious.

“I am sorry ...”

“Why ... that was remarkable.”

“I don’t know what came over me.”

“I think I do.” I smiled and leaned over and kissed her on the cheek.

“Do you?” She lifted her hand off the counter and took mine. “I don’t think you do.”

I gave her a quizzical look.

“That was the first time ...”

I gave her a surprised look. “First time?”

She nodded “that I ever had an orgasm.” I looked down at the best of her and saw that she was dripping down her leg. It wasn’t water mind you, but a thicker translucence which was her sexuality. Even in the artificial light of her kitchen it has a gem like quality to it.

My face immediately went red. “Re ...really.”

Then the inevitable happen. Her face grew pained and she dashed once again to the bathroom. When she returned her tea was ready and she was once again herself. She handed me the bottle of pink nail polish which it took.

But I put it back on the counter. She watched me do this. “Maybe later.” My mind had been made up but nonetheless as she looked at me I hesitated before asking her.

“Will you let me draw you?”

I could tell that this was not what she was expecting me to ask, but she was not disappointed either. She picked up the tea cup in one hand and took up my hand in the other.

She nodded, then led me out of her kitchen and into her living room. There in the corner of the room was an easel and her art supplies.

Without saying anything, she made her way to a grand chair and sat with her arms wrapped around her like a Matisse Odalisque.

I walked over and picked up a pencil that was laying there on a small table and opened a drawing book. There inside were the sketches she had made of me. I quickly flipped past these pages and open to a blank sheet. Then I picked up the plain chair that was in front of the easel and turned it around so that I was now facing her.

She had a warm and inviting smile. Kristi closed her eyes and opened her arms. I started to sketch her ... a look of ecstasy is how I would describe the expression on her face. Over the space of an hour the afternoon sun, which was streaming in a window from across English Bay crept silently across the floor, then up her leg and then across her figure. As the sun warmed her the colour of Kristi's skin changed from a feeble pale to a crimson pink. Then the sun sank in the water and faded. It was time for me to go. I showed her the sketches and she was pleased.

She gave me a hug at the door. I ran my hand down her bare back as we said goodbye. She wanted me to stay and tried hard to convince me, but I understood that she was lonely and vulnerable, and it would not have been proper. I promised her that we would get together for tea and some more art sometime soon.

Although I got home rather late that Friday evening I slept with a clear conscience. I imagined Kristi sleeping well, as well.

What came of this afternoon was on the balance rather nice, from water and words spilled in a bath, to a fluid series of lines that probably still hang on someone's wall, framed and immortalized.

This was the first, but not the last time Kristi would sit for a sketch by me. I never had to ask. From time to time when she needed some companionship she would telephone me and invite me over for a visit and I would sketch, nothing more.

Over the space of several sittings spaced a week or so apart, by the end of that season Kristi was immortalized in a way that would have even made Matisse proud. I let her keep all the sketches.

And with the last of our sketches in August, before she flew home to the Maritimes, came the knowledge that her pain was gone and her drugs as well, and that pleasure will always overcome pain. Now many years later I sometimes wonder what had come of her.

Was it not Matisse's friend Picasso who once said to Henri Matisse when visiting him in his studio as he worked with his model that you can have so much fun with a paint brush!

Chapter Seven: You Shouldn't Play with People

That weekend I found it necessary to sleep, and sleep I did. It was part exhaustion, and part the dreaming that kept me in my somnolent state. I dream from time to time but never as vividly as I did on that Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings. The rest of that weekend was taken up by my university work and preparations for my term finals.

Most of the time my dreams border on nightmares, because of my chronic pain. When you are awake your rational can calm the irrational that is in each and every one of us. When you are asleep that is when the rational sleeps as well and your irrational side can run amok. This weekend I did not have nightmares. Well, that's part right. When someone resembling Lauren entered my dream state then there was great turmoil, but when someone like Kristi entered my dreams it was sugar and spice, and a great deal that was nice.

Every night before I sleep I try to set my mind into a dream state that is relaxed and creative by thinking of a math or physics question as I drift asleep. This weekend, though, I thought of art, and in particular the art of Matisse. In fact, in one of my dreams I dreamt that I was Matisse himself and even dreamed in French, which is my second language. And yes, as you guessed it, Kristi was Matisse's model, set in a Mediterranean Hotel, circa 1947. She was even dressed in the manner of the times.

By Monday I had caught up in my sleep, and by Tuesday morning I was ready to sit for my first of five final, a math exam which was three hours

long starting at 0800 in the morning (zero eight double buffalo in naval parlance). That final was difficult but I completed all the questions and my sense as I left the exam room was that I had done well. I knew that the remaining four finals would not be so taxing.

About as half hour after staggering out of the math final I found myself walking through the Student Union Building on my way for a badly needed cup of coffee.

I had just entered the SUB went out of the corner of my eye I noticed a barely familiar face. It was Lauren and she looked higgledy-piggledy. It was ironic that I would come across her here because I deliberately avoided the coffee at the bus stop café for the less satisfying Sub coffee so as not to run into her. She had rubbed me not only wrong, but she had rubbed me in the raw.

But she saw me, and so I was nabbed. She looked a sight, dishevelled and plain. Her eyes were puffy and she has dark rings under them. I took pity on her the moment I set my eyes on her. Lauren had evidently been crying, and for several days for sure. A lump came in my throat. She had evidently gone to the math mixer and something had happened.

She was sitting off to the side in one of the wooden booths. She looked up at me and then let her head drop, perhaps half expecting me to just carry on without saying hello, and asking her what is up.

I slowly walked over to her and sat down beside her. She did not look up. Her head was down and tears were falling on her skirt.

I reached over and took her hand.

“You went to the mixer didn’t you?” She didn’t say anything but merely nodded.

“.... And something had happened.” She nodded again.

“The math student?” She shook her head.

“Someone else ...” She looked up and as my eyes met hers I knew that whatever had happened it must have been very dreadful. She didn’t say anything but I knew.

“Let us go somewhere else.” She looked around to see whether anyone was listening. “I need to talk with someone ... I need to talk with you.”

So much for the coffee.

“We can drive somewhere.” I looked at her and decided she was in no state to drive so I shook my head.

“Let’s go for a walk ...” and I stood up and then tugged at her hand. She remained stubbornly immobile.

“I rather we go for a drive … maybe to my place?” I shook her head.

She stared up at me. “I have another exam this afternoon and need to stay on campus. I just got out of my morning exam” I really didn’t have another exam today but it was the only potent excuse I could think of to get out of the web Lauren was spinning. I really did not want to be drawn into her life any further, in fact I want to escape her web entirely.

What I saw before me that moment was the real Lauren, not a Viennese make believe fancy, but a real Vancouver one. It was at that very moment that I realised her arrogance and assertiveness was her compensating for some form of inferiority complex. She didn’t know who she was, and didn’t want anyone to really know that.

What was it that can be said, for some hypocrisy can scarcely be distinguished from good manners. I tugged at her hand again and this time she looked up at me and then slowly stood. When she was on her feet I let go of her hand and started to walk.

I didn’t look back again until I had walked the length of the main concourse and had opened the door expecting her to walk through. She wasn’t there, at least not a step or two behind me. There she stood at the middle of the course perhaps expecting me to walk back to her to collect her.

I turned and slowly walked through the door and just continued on. It was nearly a block before I felt her presence behind me. Then I continued on to the rose garden, found a bench in the shadow and then sat down. It was a good thirty seconds before she sat down beside me.

We both looked out past the garden and out across the water. I didn't say a word, leaving her to commence the conversation. In the back of my mind I gave her two minutes then I would get up and walk away, leaving her to her own.

Then she did. "I should have listened to you and not go." Still I was silent. I knew if I said anything she would not freely associate her thoughts, and I was tired of her intrigues.

"When I got there he was waiting for me ... it was quite a scene." I nodded and she continued. "I ignored him..." I smirked and she noticed. "He followed me like a love sick puppy dog."

I gave her a knowing look and she took the bait "I guess I shouldn't have slept with him."

I looked out over the garden as she said this and asked "why did you?" not that I was really interested in why, but I figured if I didn't ask she would clam up.

“I had invited him over to help with some math and well . . .” I dropped my head and looked at her over my glasses.

Lauren wiped her brow with her hand before she continued, “it just sort have happened. Ten minutes if that and he had spent himself. It was quite a disappointment.”

“Obviously not for him.” I shook my head. “You shouldn’t play with people like that.”

Even before I had finished my sentence my thought had sunk in and she dropped her head in acknowledgment. Aha, I thought, there’s something else.

“What happened at the mixer?”

She looked at me with a very guilty air. I didn’t say anything more but just gave her an expression of curiosity.

“I . . . well . . . I drank too much.”

“So what’s wrong with that?” But I knew that there was more to her tale than that.

“But not at the mixer. One of the profs invited me into his office for Peppermint Schnapps . . .”

Oh no, I thought, but hide my reaction. I was going to ask which one, but then realized if the story went south I didn't really want to know. On such matters ignorance was definitely the wise course.

“What happened?”

“We talked about Vienna and finished the bottle … then left …”

“Together?” I knew it was the Austrian math prof, after all who else could it be, and who would keep Peppermint Schnapps in his desk.

She nodded but said no more. I looked at her and saw worry in her eyes. She started to cry again.

“There there… stop crying.” As I looked at her I thought that beneath the fundamental decency in all people something more sinister could always be found.

“What happened?”

“I don’t really know … it’s just …” Her eyes became more worried.

I waited for her to continue but she didn’t, so I asked. “Did you go back to your place?”

She shook her head.

“... his place?” She slowly nodded.

“Did you stay long?”

She dropped her head. Ah well, it began to make some sense. She had shared his bed!

There was a certain duplicity in her and her actions. It was in some sense a reflection of her Austrian heritage. I remember once reading that ‘duplicity was a duty in a society where men were ashamed not to betray their partners and women were shameless if they did.’ I believe it was something that was written in regards to Arthur Schnitzler and his book *Dream Story*.

I turned away and looked out past the roses, past the rose garden at a ship leaving Vancouver harbour. We were both silent for a few minutes. We were now touching upon something rather sensitive to her and so I felt she had to be the one to continue this conversation.

It was as if she read my mind. “I have made a terrible mistake!”

I didn’t look at her and waited.

“We had sex ...”

Still I didn't look at her.

"It was dreadful ..." She dropped her head into her hands.

I hardly knew Lauren but then again I was hardly surprised! She was reliving the mistake her own father had made, but in a reversed role. She was the one who had seduced the professor and not the other way around. Lauren had no good sense at all, and she was suffering for it.

It was almost as if she had made a decision for she stood up and I knew that she had said pretty much all she was going to say.

I remained sitting, for I did not want to follow her or know more of this sordid seduction of hers. She had done the crime and she now needed to do the time. That was the only way she would learn.

The last thing she said before she walked away was "I do hope I don't get pregnant."

Lauren went one way up across the garden and down onto the boulevard, no doubt to walk to her car and drive herself home. I knew she was Catholic, at least in spirit, although not necessarily in action. She would most likely leave matters to take their course.

Far in the distance the ship leaving the harbour gave out one long pull on its steam whistle.

When the echo had faded I got up and went the other way, back up the stairs to the university and my exam prep, back to my model life.

Pictorial: Noir et Blanc ...



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